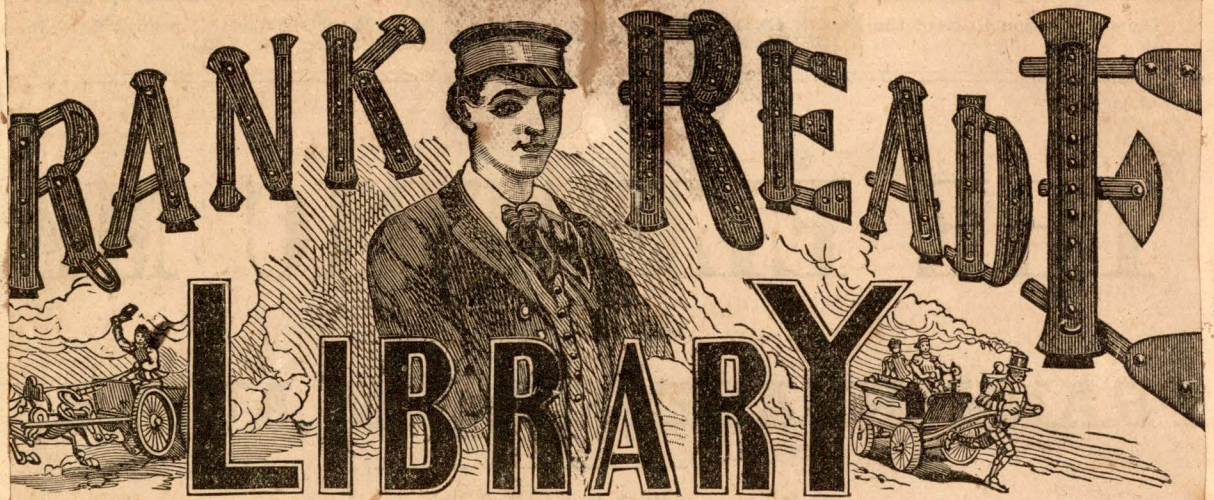


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THE ELECTRIC MAN:

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr., in Australia.

By "Noname."



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THE ELECTRIC MAN;

OR, FRANK READE, JR., IN AUSTRALIA.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Fighting the Slave Hunters; or, Frank Reads, Jr., in North Australia," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK READE JR. IN AUSTRALIA.—HIS SPEECH AT
THE RECEPTION BANQUET.

THE great banquet room in St. Georges' Hall at Sydney, in faraway Australia, was ablaze with light and resplendent with the beauty and fashion of the colonial city.

The long tables were laden with the delicacies of two continents, which the culinary arts of the best caterers in Australia had been summoned to prepare.

Great banks of rich and rare flowers, placed at intervals along the length of the tables, filled the great room with fragrant perfumes as well as dazzled the eye with their many colors.

It was a gala night in Sydney and all the representatives of the nobility of England then in Australia, as well as the heads of all the departments of the local government, had assembled to do honor to a young American inventor, whose fame had already reached the uttermost parts of the civilized world—FRANK READE, JR.

He had just arrived on invitation of the scientific societies and the government's representatives, and this was the reception accorded him.

As he entered the great hall leaning on the arm of the mayor, every eye was turned on him. The ladies particularly craned their necks to get a glimpse of one about whom they had heard so much, and they were gratified with the sight of a manly, compact figure, denoting great strength and activity, whose face was bronzed by the winds and suns of a voyage of 13,000 miles through two oceans.

Introductions followed, and the graceful bearing and pleasant smiles of the famous young inventor won the hearts of all.

Sir James Halsey was the mayor of Sydney at the time of Frank's arrival, and the young inventor was in his hands. He introduced the ladies and gentlemen with a dignity that was pleasant to all.

The introduction over, the mayor led the way to the head of one of the long tables, to the strains of most exquisite music. He seated the guest of the evening at his right, and Lady Ackerly on his left.

An hour passed in delightful enjoyment of the good things on the tables, after which the wine was brought on.

Of course the first toast among Englishmen is the health of the queen, which was proposed and drunk standing. The mayor responded in loyal tones, and ended by proposing the health of the guest of the evening, Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., the most famous of living inventors.

The name elicited a storm of applause. The men sprang to their feet and held their glasses above their heads, whilst the ladies waved dainty handkerchiefs, and showered their smiles upon the bronzed-faced young inventor.

Frank rose to his feet and bowed right and left, whilst the applause shook the immense building. He essayed to speak, but his voice was lost in the tempest of sounds that greeted him.

At last the mayor waved his hand for silence, and the storm gradually subsided.

Frank Reade, Jr., said in clear manly tones:
"Mr. Mayor, and Ladies and Gentlemen—The warmth of your reception of myself surpasses my wildest anticipations, and words in which to

express the emotions of my heart utterly fail me. I have flown round the globe and rested in the capitals of all the nations, but never before in my life have I received such a reception as this. Believe me when I say that I am at a loss to know how to respond to it. Here are men whose fame as soldiers, statesmen and savants encircle the globe doing honor to one, but a few short years out of his teens. You overwhelm me, and yet I am prouder tonight than ever before in my life, and this magnificent scene—these fair and smiling faces around me—will never pass away as long as memory remains and reason holds her own. I have come to you with my two faithful attendants—typical representatives of the Celt and African—at your solicitation, to render what aid I can in solving some of the mysteries of Australia. If, with the aid of the appliances I have brought with me, you can attain your wish and lift the veil that obscures the view across the bosom of the greatest island in the world, I shall be equally paid with yourselves in the satisfaction with the result. You have asked me to invent, build and bring over with me a conveyance calculated to go far beyond the endurance of animal life, in order that you may ascertain the fate of adventurous spirits who have gone forth and never returned, and I have done so. (Tumultuous applause.) You desire to go farther and solve questions that the geographers of the day cannot elucidate; to sound the depths of the geological mysteries of the interior of Australia, and unravel the tangled traditions of the natives concerning the mineral wealth, which lies concealed thousands of miles away toward the horizon. I have come prepared to brave every danger in furthering your wishes. On the other side of the globe my people regard Australia as a wonderful country, *fama and flora* differs from all the rest of the world, hence, you see, I have no little personal interest in this expedition. I know there are mountains to scale, rivers to cross, and boundless plains to traverse, whilst natives and wicked bushmen stand ready to hinder or to slay. Yet I come without horse, saddle or bridle—without airships or boats to take us through the perils of the way. Yet we do not hesitate to go—for we have an ELECTRIC MAN to take charge of us and bring us safely back to this regal city of Sydney."

The storm of applause which followed the words "electric man" told of the intensity of the public curiosity as to the mode of conveyance the young American inventor had adopted.

It was to be an "Electric Man;" a thing far more wonderful than the famous airships, with which he had flown around the world.

The waiters whispered it to those about the doors of the great banquet hall, and the news was carried to the thousands which thronged the streets for blocks away.

"An electric man! Electric man!" went from mouth to mouth, and in a little while it was known even among the suburbs.

The excitement rose to fever heat, and thousands more rushed toward St. George's Hall in the hope that a glimpse of the wonder might be had.

When the young American had finished speaking, Sir Arthur Paget exclaimed aloud:

"His eloquence equals his inventions. Drink to his health and success!"

Every glass was emptied, and then another

wild burst of applause followed. Sir James Halsey rose to reply to the speech of the guest.

It was a grand, lofty tribute to the inventive genius of Frank Reade, Jr., exclaiming:

"Though an American he belongs to the world; the world is his field! He overcomes the elements—he penetrates space and rescues the unfortunate from the jaws of death!"

Again the building shook with the applause, and Frank blushed in spite of himself at the praises of the eloquent mayor.

Other toasts were drunk and other speeches made, but the "Electric Man" was the universal theme. The beautiful Lady Ackerly leaned forward and asked:

"Mr. Reade, where is that wonderful Electric Man?"

"He is on shipboard yet, madam," he replied, "but will doubtless come ashore to-morrow."

"Shall we see him then?"

"I do not design placing him on exhibition. I am afraid you would be frightened at sight of him, as he cannot smile, nor is he soft of speech, nor do I think that his perception is such as enable him to distinguish the most beautiful lady in Sydney from the most repulsive looking bush man."

"Horrible!" exclaimed the lady, with a shudder. "Even though you could not give him brains, you could at least have made him handsome, Mr. Reade."

"So I could, dear lady, but I was not willing to assume the responsibility in doing so."

"Why, dear me!" exclaimed the vivacious lady, greatly pleased at the idea of having monopolized the lion of the evening for a few brief moments, "what is the responsibility as between the two?"

"A great many of your sex would have hopelessly fallen in love with him," replied Frank, at which there was an explosion at that end of the table at Lady Ackerly's expense.

"Really now," she retorted, "you do not think so meanly of our sex as to think a woman could fall in love with an inanimate piece of machinery, do you?"

"Have you not heard of men and women falling deeply, madly in love with a face on canvas?" he asked, looking the beautiful lady full in the face as he spoke.

"Oh, yes, but that was sympathetic sentiment."

"Call it by what name you will," he said, "the fact remains and cannot be argued away."

"Well, you need not have feared any broken hearts among Sydney ladies," she said, laughing. "There are too many live men here for any woman to sigh for a machine man."

"The daughters of Eve are the same the world over, and there are many a one who would be glad to exchange a worthless husband for my 'Electric Man.'"

"That's true as gospel," exclaimed Sir James Halsey, "for I know a number myself who would gladly make the exchange," and they all laughed again.

"Oh, you men like to laugh at us women, but you like us all the more for our weaknesses," Lady Ackerly retorted.

"Ah! you have uttered a great truth, madame," said Frank, earnestly. "There is no influence on earth that equals woman's. Without her re-

fining influence man would have remained a savage to this day."

"I believe you there, Mr. Reade," said the mayor. "She is the better half of man always, and she is strongest when she is weakest."

"How tall is your Electric Man, Mr. Reade?" Lady Ackerly asked.

"He is about eight feet tall and stout in proportion," was the reply.

"Dear me! He must be very strong."

"He is, indeed—a veritable Samson, I can assure you, and yet he cannot make love. He was born to hard work all his life."

"What a pity. Really, I must see him. You cannot refuse me. I shall go down to the pier and demand to be allowed to go on board the ship to-morrow."

"You would see nothing there but his remains in several boxes," returned Frank, smiling. "It will take me several days to put him together, and infuse life into him."

"Oh, yes, I forgot," and she laughed one of her sweet, silvery laughs that rang like music through the room. "But you are going to put him together soon, are you not?"

"Just as soon as I can get him landed in the proper place," he replied.

By and by other toasts were given and drunk, followed by short and witty speeches, all of which Frank enjoyed very much.

The banquet lasted till a late hour and then ended.

But a number of distinguished men accompanied Frank to his hotel, as if loth to leave him. The freedom of the city had been voted him, and they all felt that they could not do too much honor to him.

Many of them asked about Barney and Pomp, of whom they had read so much in the published accounts of his travels round the world.

"They are on board ship," he said, "taking care of the Electric Man. Two more faithful fellows never lived than they."

CHAPTER II.

FRANK PUTS THE ELECTRIC MAN TOGETHER.

At an early hour the next morning after the reception banquet at St. George's Hall, Frank sent a communication to the mayor requesting the use of some large building to which he could have the Electric Man sent for the purpose of putting it together.

The mayor very promptly responded by placing at his disposal a large long building which had been used as a warehouse, but was now vacant.

Frank inspected the building and found that it would answer his purpose admirably, and at once ordered a force of men to clean it out thoroughly.

In less than an hour's time a score of men were at work sweeping and scouring out the long building.

In the meantime he entered a carriage and rode down to the pier where the good ship Mary Ann was moored, to look after the landing of his effects.

To his surprise thousands of people thronged the pier and the street leading to it. They had heard that the Electric Man was on board, and naturally supposed that he would walk ashore like any other man when it came time for him to land.

The police were pushing them back to keep the way open, and hard work they had of it. It took two policemen nearly a half hour to make the carriage to reach the pier.

"Here the people that the Electric Man is in a hundred pieces, and packed in boxes," said Frank to one of the officers, "and that it will take several days to put him together."

The police was given, but it had little effect on the crowd. They wanted to see the boxes, the inventor, Barney and Pomp, and so they remained standing in the hot sun for hours.

When Frank alighted from the carriage to go on board ship the good-natured crowd gave him an old-fashioned yell and a tiger. He bowed, lifted his hat to them and then went on board, where Barney and Pomp were the first to receive him.

The crowd suspected who Pomp was, and at once began to call to him:

"How are you, Pomp, old man?"

"Glad to see you!"

"Give us a break-down, Pomp!"

"You look well, old man!"

Pomp looked at the crowd and grinned from ear to ear.

"They seem to know you here, Pomp," said Frank.

"Yes sah—dat's er fac'."

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, "it's a blond man as can't tell a naygur from a white man."

"Dat's a fac', Barney," said Pomp. "But dese

heah folks ain't blind yit, and they know er nigger from an Irisher. Irishers ain't no whar in dis heah country."

Barney began to believe that Pomp was half right, and a huge streak of jealousy began to loom up in his mind.

"Say, Pomp!" cried a voice on the pier, "where's the Irishman?"

"Heah he am!" replied Pomp, taking Barney by the arm and leading him to the side of the ship. "Dis am der Irisher."

The crowd roared, and then the Irish element in the throng asserted itself. They yelled themselves hoarse, throwing hats in the air, and giving some wild Irish whoops which Barney promptly recognized as the genuine article.

When silence was restored—which was done by Pomp's waving hands, and words to the effect that Barney would speak.

"Be aisy now!" cried Barney, interrupting him. "Sure, an' it's no spaker I am. I've been up in ther clouds an' down under the say, but divil a wan a me knows how it come about. Sure an' it's upside down yer ould island will be av misher Frank get hould of it wid his electric diviltry."

The crowd roared with laughter and broke through the line of policemen to get nearer to the ship.

Heads were clubbed, and in less than two minutes a free fight with the police was raging.

"Be ther powers!" exclaimed Barney, "lave me get at em! I—"

But Pomp grabbed Barney and held him fast.

"Hole on dar, Barney," he said, as the Irishman struggled to get away. "Marse Frank doan't want no fuss heah!"

"Lave go av me coat, yer black spalpeen! Do yez mind ther ruction now! Sure, an' it's comin' till Australia to see it."

Frank rushed back to where Pomp and Barney were struggling, and took in the situation at a glance. He promptly collared Barney and led him below out of sight of the crowd. Pomp remained on deck, for he did not have an itching for a ruction every time he saw a blow struck, as did the inflammable Barney.

When a squad of extra police came to the rescue, the trouble was overcome and the crowd dispersed, and Frank proceeded to the discharge of his freight.

A half dozen trucks appeared, and the whole cargo belonging to the expedition was removed to the vacant warehouse, which was now ready to receive it.

Barney and Pomp went to the warehouse in the carriage with Frank, and entered the building to take charge of everything inside of it.

On the outside the police guarded the warehouse so effectually, that no one without a permit from Frank was allowed to enter it.

All the afternoon Barney and Pomp were busy opening the boxes which contained the electric man and the strange vehicle he was to draw behind him.

When all the boxes were opened Frank laid off his coat, drew on a pair of overalls, and went to work putting the wonderful invention together.

There were hundreds of pieces all properly marked, so that no mistake as to their use could be made.

First, he took a box which contained the feet of the Electric Man, and laid the joints down on the floor and began putting them together.

Barney and Pomp knelt down by him and watched the operation with deep interest. One foot began to assume shape with great iron heel and toes. It was a huge, strong foot, with sole so rough that slipping was impossible.

"Ef dat foot kicks yer, Barney," said Pomp, after watching for some time, "yer'd tink er yairthquake had hit yer."

"Bedad, it's roight ye are, Pomp. Sure, an' av it kiks me, I'll loi down an' dol."

"Well, make up your mind that whoever strikes the other in anger shall have a good healthy kick from this iron foot."

Barney crossed himself, and said:

"The saints betune us an' harrum."

Pomp grinned, for he knew it would be hard work from that hour for Barney to keep out of trouble.

The Electric Man grew rapidly under the skilled knowledge of the famous young inventor. The limbs grew apace and then the body assumed shape as it lay face downward.

When the shell that so vividly resembled the human form was complete Frank opened the back and put in some machinery that seemed delicate and complicated.

Every piece was of bright and polished steel, and had been tested in the shop where made, and found to work smoothly and noiselessly.

When all the machinery was in the electric

man the door in the back was closed and the body turned over on the back, face upward.

The eyes were large and of the finest cut glass; the nose prominent and defiant, whilst the mouth was firm, with lips just parted enough to show a row of ivories that any darky might have envied. Taken all in all, the face had an expression of dignity and power, which could not be mistaken by even the most ignorant observer.

"Dat's er big man," remarked Pomp, as he gazed down at the iron form at his feet.

"Sure an' he's loike the giant of Galway," said Barney.

"Was dat giant er black man, Barney?" Pomp asked.

"Phat! A Galway giant a naygur!" exclaimed Barney. "Bedad, it's white he was."

"Den dis heah man ain't like him. He's black—a nigger all ober, Barney," and Pomp grinned from ear to ear over his advantage.

"Now for the wagon," said Frank, turning to the boxes which held the parts.

Then they turned to the vehicle and began with the wheels, which were of the finest steel. The tires were five inches wide so as not to sink into sand or boggy earth, but light and of extraordinary strength and durability. They were put on the axles and properly secured, after which the shafts were attached and the wires connected with the machinery inside the Electric Man. Then followed the putting up of the body of the carriage, which was of light steel net work to afford light, air and protection. Inside were shutters to shut off wind and dust, as well as rain and heat. This being done the electric battery was screwed on underneath and the rods that were to connect it with the engine above, adjusted. All this took two days of diligent work, and Frank was careful to see that everything was done right, as otherwise the machinery would not work.

When the carriage was finished it was an elegant-looking affair, and Barney and Pomp were loud in their praises of it.

From a box he took a steel helmet, with a glass globe on top of the crown. He fastened the helmet on the electric man's head by means of screws.

"Now let's get him between the shafts," and Barney and Pomp exerted their united strength to get him on his feet, whilst Frank promptly secured him to the steel shafts, connecting every wire to its proper place.

"Now we are all right," he said, "and ready to travel."

CHAPTER III.

THE TRIAL—OFF FOR THE INTERIOR!

EVERYTHING being in readiness for a trial of the machinery, Frank sent word to Sir James Halsey, the mayor, that he and those directly interested could see the electric man demonstrate his power at that evening at the warehouse.

Of course the mayor and all the members of the city government, together with the prominent ladies and gentlemen who were at the banquet, came at an early hour in the evening.

Frank received them, and Barney and Pomp stood by the electric man and vehicle to see that no one meddled with anything.

Exclamations of wonder escaped every one on first sight of the electric man.

When all had arrived, Frank placed a guard at the door, and then went to the side of the electric man, and said to the spectators:

"This man is a Samson in physical strength—in fact, the limit of his strength is unknown even to me, as every bone and muscle in him is of the finest steel. The machinery that works his limbs is inside of him, and he can walk, run, jump, and kick forward or backward with wonderful agility. The motive power that moves him is in a powerful electric battery inclosed in yonder box, under the floor of the carriage, and is communicated to him through wires inside the shafts. The engineer inside the carriage controls everything, as does the engineer of a steam car or boat. That is the whole thing in a nutshell. There are other details—in the tool-chests which form seats and sleeping-berths on both sides of the carriage—in which you are not interested. By pressing one knob inside the carriage, there, I start the battery under the floor, and the man shows signs of light and life. That globe on his helmet gives forth a light that equals the noonday sun, and his eyes do the same. At will I can extinguish all the lights, or only one at a time, just as I may elect. Then another knob starts him going, and another will turn him to the right and another to the left—just as a faithful horse obeys the rein and the bit—and all, too, without my being exposed to any danger from without."

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" were the comments heard on all sides, and the young inventor was forced to stop and answer questions that were put to him every moment.

He invited the mayor and three others to enter the carriage and take a ride around the warehouse, and they accepted.

As soon as they were seated in the carriage Frank started the electric battery going, and in another minute the man between the shafts shook as if bracing up for a run.

Touching another knob the young inventor had the satisfaction of seeing the Electric Man dart off on a quick run around the great warehouse. Very little noise was made, for the machinery worked so perfect in every joint that no friction was caused that amounted to anything.

"The most wonderful invention of the age!" exclaimed the mayor.

"Seems like a dream," said Sir Arthur Paget.

"I can hardly realize it," said the third man, a well-known banker of Sydney.

Round the great building went the Electric Man, not a single jar causing the least detention.

When it reached the starting-point the party emerged from the carriage and another entered to take a ride around the building.

Among them was Lady Ackerly, the beautiful young lady with whom Frank conversed on the evening of the banquet.

"Oh, Mr. Reade," she exclaimed, "I am so nervous! You won't let him run away with us, will you?"

Frank laughed.

"Now you are laughing at me!" she said, pouting like a spoiled child.

"I was laughing in spite of myself," said Frank. "You are the only lady I ever saw who was nervous over the idea of a man running away with her."

"Oh, you horrid man!" she exclaimed, as the party joined in the laugh against her.

Barney came to Frank after a half dozen trips around the building had been taken, saying that a man at the door wanted to see the mayor.

Frank told Sir James what the trouble was and the mayor sent a man to see who it was.

The man soon returned accompanied by another man with glasses across his nose and a very benevolent expression of countenance.

"Ah!" exclaimed the mayor, grasping his hand, "Professor Bagstock! I am glad to see you! You have come just in time. Mr. Reade, I have the honor of introducing to you Professor Bagstock, who is to accompany you on your expedition."

"I am rejoiced to meet you, professor," said Frank, shaking hands with the professor very cordially. "We are taking a few spins around the room in the carriage. Will you not step inside with us?"

The professor did so, and he was highly pleased with everything he saw.

"Just the thing," he said, as he watched the motions of the Electric Man. "Better than a horse. The natives and bushmen will not dare attack such a man as that."

When the exhibition was over Frank told the professor that he would be ready to start at midnight of the next day, and that he would wait for him till that hour.

"But why not start in the day-time?" the professor asked.

"Because half the population will crowd the streets and give us no end of trouble. Let no one know the hour of starting."

The party then went away, and Barney and Pomp remained behind to keep watch over the machine.

All the next day was spent by Frank in purchasing such supplies as might be needed where neither food or water could be had. Everything was in condensed form, and a liberal water supply was arranged for.

Precisely at the appointed hour Professor Bagstock was on hand prepared to accompany Frank—with all of his scientific instruments with him.

"Time is up," said Frank. "Jump in, professor. Open that door there, Pomp, and shut it again after we are through."

The professor entered the carriage by the rear door, whilst Pomp opened the entrance to the warehouse for it to pass through.

Frank guided the Electric Man carefully, and they passed safely through to the street.

Then he stopped to take up Pomp, after which he turned on the electric lights and dashed away like a railroad train.

People heard the tramp—tramp—tramp of the Electric Man, and dashed out on the streets just in time to see him go by.

The wildest kind of excitement ensued, and hundreds ran with all their might to keep it in sight as long as possible.

But they were left behind, for the Electric Man was swift of foot, and in a few minutes the city limits were passed.

Professor Bagstock looked as if he were very uneasy about something, and after a while asked Frank:

"Have you thought of what the consequences would be, Mr. Reade, if you were to run against a stone or stump when going so fast?"

"Oh yes," replied Frank. "It would be disastrous in the extreme."

"So I thought. Why do you run such risks?"

"Because I am on the lookout for stones and stumps all the time, and do not propose to run against any of them."

"Ah—yes—true. I never thought of that."

They ran very fast when the road would permit, and very slow when they reached a rough part.

The road ran along the north bank of the river Parramatta for about forty miles when it struck another town.

The people were all sleeping soundly and didn't dream of the wonderful thing in their midst.

The Electric Man passed through the town quickly, and struck the road beyond which, for about ten miles, was very smooth. They made the run in about three quarters of an hour.

Then they struck a rough road which seemed to crawl lazily up over the mountain range.

"We'll take it slow along here," said Frank, and the Electric Man began to walk at about four miles an hour.

They kept up that pace till sunrise, by which time they had reached the top of the mountain. The Professor suggested that they stop there and have breakfast.

"I am pretty well shaken up, and feel the loss of my usual sleep," he said.

"You can sleep in the carriage at any hour, day or night, that you may wish," said Frank.

"Well, the novelty is worn off now, and I guess I can sleep some to-day or to-night."

They stopped a couple of hours to kill game and eat breakfast, after which they resumed the descent of the mountain, going very leisurely all the way down.

"There are very few settlers on this side of the mountains," remarked Frank to Bagstock.

"Yes, very few, and even those are not sure that the other side is a safe place for them."

"Ah, they are hard cases then?"

"Yes, more or less."

"We must be careful how we stop among them, then."

"Yes, for some of them are really very desperate characters," said Professor Bagstock.

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!" exclaimed Pomp, "jes' look at dat jumpin' rat!"

They looked in the direction Pomp indicated, and saw a terrified kangaroo making his best paces for a place of safety.

Such leaps as he made astonished even Frank, who had seen the animals before.

"That's a kangaroo," said the professor, with a smile. "The woods are full of them."

"Golly, but dey kin jump," said Pomp.

"Yes, they have been known to make some very long jumps," remarked the professor.

"Dem kandyroos don't wan' no wings—dat's er fact."

"Bedad, an, yez are roight, Pomp," said Barney. "The spalpeen flew wid his tail."

They decided that they would try to shoot one during the day and Barney stood ready with a good rifle to do so, Frank having rung down the steel-netted sides of the carriage that he might have a fair shot.

But the day passed without getting a kangaroo in sight, and night came on just as they reached the banks of a stream.

"We may as well cook supper here," said Frank, "and then push on by electric light."

"Yes, and I think we can follow this river all night," said the professor. "It runs in the direction we want to go."

"We'll follow it as long as we can," remarked Frank.

They found plenty of game in the way of pheasants, and had a sumptuous supper. Pomp had improved wonderfully in his cooking of wild game since his last trip with Frank.

When they started again it was quite dark, but the wonderful brilliancy of the electric light on the big man's helmet lighted up the scene for a quarter of a mile around.

They moved on down the river, the absence of any undergrowth enabling them to make considerable speed at times.

The electric light frequently caused fowls to make some fearful noises, and then all would be still till another one was alarmed.

Two hours after starting they heard a peculiar noise such as they had not heard before. They paid little attention to it, however, and kept on.

Frank was guiding, keeping a sharp lookout ahead.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of horror and stopped the Electric Man right in his tracks.

"What is it?"

"Look there!"

In front of the Electric Man, in the full glare of the electric light, stood an enormous native chief, with head erect, defiantly gazing at the Man before him, whilst behind him, half a hundred of his followers, as if terror-stricken, were on their knees, with their foreheads touching the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

A SINGULAR ENCOUNTER WITH NATIVES—BARNEY SHOOTS A KANGAROO.

ALL four men in the carriage glared at the savages with feelings of intense anxiety.

The chief was fierce-looking and defiant, and was such a giant in comparison with his followers that he must have been chosen chief by reason of his size.

He was almost black, but his hair though curly was not kinky like most black people's. His face wore an expression of mingled wonder, fierceness and surprise, as though he did not understand what manner of man the Electric Man was, and yet was not afraid of him.

In his left hand he carried a spear and boomerang—in his right a club large enough to fell an ox with.

Not one of his followers dared to look up at the Electric Man.

They were terrified beyond expression, and did not know what to do.

"They are natives!" gasped the professor, trembling like a leaf.

"Let me bore a hole in him, bedad," said Barney, taking a rifle from the rack.

"Keep quiet, Barney. Don't fire unless I say so. I can kill the whole band with electricity if they attack us."

"They'll be sure to do that," said the professor, "when they see that there are only four of us."

"But that won't do them any good. One man inside here is worth a thousand outside. I want to get through without having to hurt any of them, if possible."

"I don't think you can do that," the professor said, "for they have no common sense at all. They never learn from experience."

"Well, we'll see what they will do," said Frank, as he sat there and gazed at the big savage in front of the electric light.

The savage had gazed at the electric light now till he could not see anything else. If he gazed in another direction, he saw nothing but black darkness, whilst Frank could see everything around him.

"I'll give 'em a surprise," said Frank in a whisper. "Just keep quiet, all of you."

He touched a knob before him, and the electric light went out in an instant, leaving everything in total darkness.

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!" grunted the natives; and then all was silent for a minute or two.

Then a howl from one—evidently from the chief—went up, and the others answered with yells.

Frank heard spears rattling together, and low, guttural sounds, as if the chief was giving orders to his followers. Fearing they might make an attack in the dark, he turned on the electric light again, and revealed the natives massed around their stalwart chief.

But the glare of the light was too much for them, and down they all went on their knees again, whilst the chief stood defiantly up, and glared at the brilliant blaze which he could not understand nor account for.

"Bedad," said Barney, "the naygurs haven't sinse enough to run away."

"Dat's er fact," assented Pomp, "only dey ain't niggers."

"Keep quiet," ordered Frank, still watching the big chief, who now began to blink his eyes, rub them a little and then make an effort to make out what it was before him.

Suddenly he gave a whoop, and every one of his followers sprang to his feet.

They looked at him for further orders.

He raised his right hand above his head, poised a spear in the air for a few moments, and then hurled it at the breast of the iron man in front of him.

The spear went true to the mark, but fell shattered to the ground.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Frank.

The dumfounded chief seized another spear from one of his followers, and then hurled it after the first one with still greater force.

That shared even a worse fate than the other—it was splintered into fragments, and fell at the feet of the Electric Man.

The chief raised his heavy club above his head and rushed on the Electric Man to deal him a blow on the head.

But Frank promptly turned a crank and the right foot of the Electric Man flew up, struck the chief in the stomach and landed him over in the midst of his cowering followers, the sickest man ever seen in Australia.

The natives crowded around him and tried to brace him up, but the blow on the stomach from a big iron foot was too much for him, and he laid back on the ground and groaned with pain. "I am sorry to have to do it," said Frank, "but he would have broken that globe with his club, and I didn't want him to do that."

"It beats anything I ever saw or heard of," said the professor, adjusting his spectacles, and taking another look at the savages in front of the Electric Man.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "Dat man kin kick wuss'n er mule."

"I am going to run around them and see if they will follow us," said Frank, suiting his actions to his words.

The Electric Man turned to the right and trotted off, leaving the terrified natives with their chief to wonder what strange apparition had appeared to them so unexpectedly. But they did not think of following the electric lights.

Their chief was unable to lead them, and they would not budge an inch without him.

In a little while they were out of sight of the band, and then they turned toward the river again, which they reached after a run of a couple of miles.

Professor Bagstock and Frank went to bed on the narrow adjustable berths over the tool chests at midnight, leaving Barney and Pomp to take turns at running the Electric Man till daylight.

"Follow the course of the river," said Frank, "as long as you can, and when you find that you can't call me and tell me what the trouble is."

Barney was the first on watch, and he kept the Electric Man trotting steadily till time came for Pomp to take charge.

Then he laid down and went to sleep.

But in less than a half hour Pomp woke Frank up gently, saying:

"Marse Frank, we can't go no farder dis way."

"What's the matter?" asked Frank.

"Dere's anuder ribber heah—we's in de fork."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, it am for er fac."

"Well, put out the lights and go to bed. We may as well rest here as anywhere else."

Pomp was of that opinion too, and in less than ten minutes he was in his berth snoring away like all possessed.

They all slept soundly till the incessant twittering of birds awoke them after dawn.

Barney was the first one to open his eyes, and on looking out he saw that the carriage was standing still and Pomp fast asleep.

He could not understand it, for he and Pomp had run together for many years, and he had never known him to shirk a duty.

But he said nothing at the time, concluding to wait and see what Frank would have to say about it when he woke up.

As he lay there looking out through the network that inclosed the carriage he was astonished at seeing two big kangaroos leaping about in the grass and under the trees.

They seemed to be leaping about either for fun or exercise—he could not tell which. But he was so excited over their presence and near approach to the carriage that he could not stop to do much thinking.

One of them came within shooting distance, and Barney reached for his gun, which was just above his head.

He took a quick aim and fired.

The Kangaroo gave a bound of some ten or twelve feet in the air, and fell back in the grass in the agonies of death.

Of course the report awakened the sleepers.

Prof. Bagstock sprang out of his berth with a yell, and asked:

"In the name of Heaven, what's the matter?"

"What is it, Barney?" Frank asked, looking around just in time to see the mate of the wounded kangaroo making off with bounds which fully proved the extent of his terror.

"Shure, an' it's kilt he is," said Barney, looking over at the kicking animal in the grass.

"What was it—a kangaroo?"

"Yes, sor—one av thim jumpin' rats," replied Barney. "Bedad, but the other wan jumped loike ther ould Nick."

"Yes, they are the best jumpers in the world."

Frank and the professor hurriedly dressed and went out to look at the dead kangaroo.

Barney was a good shot.

His bullet had gone through the kangaroo's head, and it was dead in a very few minutes.

"Bedad," said Barney, after looking at the long hind legs and immense tail of the singular animal, "av I had legs loike thim, an' a tail to balance me, I'd jump over the moon."

"Is it good ter eat?" Pomp asked.

"Faith an' av yez ate it the ould Nick would be afther slaping wid yer," remarked Barney.

"They are frequently eaten," said the professor, "for I have seen hundreds of people who consider their meat good, though I have never tasted it myself."

"We'll put off eating it till some other time," said Frank. "These woods are full of game. I can hear pheasants calling each other out there."

"Yes, this seems to be a good place for game," remarked the professor, looking around.

"Build your fire, Pomp," Frank ordered, "and I'll have some game in a few minutes."

The professor took a gun and went with him some distance in the woods, leaving Barney and Pomp to arrange the temporary camp for the meal.

Pomp made a fire and Barney went down to the river to bring up a pail of water.

Just as he was about to dip the pail into the water he saw a fowl as large as a seven or eight pound hen jump out of a little clump of bushes and run along the bank of the river.

"Bedad!" he exclaimed, "it's a foine poi yez would make," and he hastened back to the camp with the pail of water, snatched up a gun and ran back to get a shot at the strange bird he had seen.

He ran forward about two hundred yards, and was fortunate enough to get a glimpse of the fowl again.

He aimed quickly and fired at it, and had the satisfaction of seeing it fall.

But just as he was about to go forward to secure the game he heard a rush of something behind him, and, wheeling around to see what it was, he was almost paralyzed at the peril of his situation.

Over one hundred enormous birds, whose heads were as high as his own from the ground, were rushing toward him in a panic.

He had no time to think. The great birds—as large as ostriches—were upon him. He gave up and fell on his knees.

CHAPTER V.

BARNEY AND THE EMUS.—THE BOOMERANG.

THE EMUS—for that is the name of the great Australian ostrich—had been started up by Frank and the professor, and in their panic they had run upon Barney.

In the rush they did not see him in the bushes, and that's why they ran over him.

One of them struck him, and both rolled over on the ground together—the emu the worst hurt of the two.

But they were gone in another minute, and Barney pulled himself together with some misgivings as to whether he was all there or not.

"Be the powers!" he exclaimed, as he rubbed his bruises and looked after the retreating birds, "it's a noice flock av chickens yez are," and he picked up his hat which had been knocked off by the big bird. "Sure, an' wan wants a cannon whin he hunts in this counthry. Blissid be the man as foinds the nists av thim birruds. Faith, their eggs must be the soize av cocoanuts."

When he reached his game he stood over it, looking down at it, like one bewitched.

"Howly Mither av Moses!" he exclaimed. "That iver I should foind a birrud wid no wings at all at all!" and he took up the strange bird and looked at it.

It had no wings, yet in every other respect it was a perfect bird.

Barney gently laid his gun down on the grass, and vigorously crossed himself for several minutes.

"Sure, an' it's bewitched I am," he said, "or this land is ould Nick's."

He took up the strange fowl and made his way back to camp.

"Hi, Barney," exclaimed Pomp when he saw him coming, "why didn't you kill one ob dem big birds! Dey run by heah like de ould Nick was arter dem."

"Sure an' it's a cannon yez wants ter kill one of them horse birruds."

"Horse birds?"

"Yis, bedad. Sure an' its loike horses they run. The darthly fowls rin over me loike I was a frog, bedad!"

Pomp laughed, and asked:

"What's dat you's got dare, Barney?"

"Niver the wan ov me knows," replied the Irishman, throwing the game on the ground at

Pomp's feet. "Bedad we'll foind natives with no hids on them next, I'm thinkin'."

"Why, Barney, dis heah bird ain't got no wings!" exclaimed Pomp.

"Thank yees, Pomp. I am not off me nut. Sure an' I didn't know but me hid was wrong enthirely," and Barney looked down at the bird as if he regarded him with very great suspicion.

"Dare goos de pigeons!" exclaimed Pomp, as an immense flock flew over the little camp. "Shoot some ob dem, Barney. Dey is good ter eat."

Barney shook his head in disgust, and said:

"They fly—they have wings, bedad. But av ye kill wan yez'll foind they have no legs, begorra!" and he looked as though he wanted to return to Ireland or America without more ado.

Just then Frank and the professor hove in sight loaded down with game which they had secured in the forest.

"What did you kill, Barney?" Frank asked, as he threw down a brace of pheasants and a dozen bronze-winged pigeons.

"Dis am what he killed," said Pomp, holding up the strange bird Barney had brought in, "and he's mad because it didn't hab no wing," and Pomp laughed heartily at Barney and his superstitious fears.

Barney was angry in a moment, and was about to make an angry retort, when Frank said:

"Keep quiet now. Did you see that flock of big birds run down this way?"

"Yes, sorr, an' I was rin over by 'em, bedad."

"Did they run over you?"

"Yis, sorr, an' kicked me out loike I was a loafer."

"Why in thunder didn't you shoot one of them? I'd give fifty dollars to get one of them dead or alive."

"Faith, thin, it's a cannon yez want ter shoot 'em wid," replied Barney.

Frank laughed, and said:

"Shoot at their heads, and they are easily killed, I guess."

Pomp took the game and began to prepare it for breakfast, whilst the professor, who was familiar with the animal kingdom of Australia as well as its bird life, expatiated on the peculiarities of the rare bird which Barney had shot.

"It has no wings," said Frank, "hence I do not see why it should be called a bird."

"It has all the characteristics of a bird save wings," said the professor.

"Yes, I suppose it has. It is one of the strangest specimens I ever saw."

"There is another animal, or fowl, I don't know which," remarked the professor, "which will puzzle you even more than that. It lives on the water courses, has the body of a dog and the head and bill of a duck."

"Howly mither av Moses!" exclaimed Barney, who was listening to what was being said.

"What ails yer, Barney?" Pomp asked.

"I'm sick," said Barney. "Sure an' av I iver git out av this country, it's out I'll stay."

Pomp grinned.

His superstition was of a different turn from the Irishman's.

When the breakfast was ready the four sat down, ate heartily, smoked their pipes and then decided to remain there during the day and ensuing night for the purpose of hunting the game which seemed to be so plentiful thereabouts.

Barney and Pomp got out a small tent and set it up, and put up the portable camp-table, and made the place look like a gentleman's camp in a very few minutes.

An hour or so after breakfast Frank and the professor again took their guns and started out in quest of game, leaving Barney and Pomp in charge of the camp.

"Don't go fifty yards away from camp, either of you," said Frank, "for you don't know what may happen in a country like this."

Barney crossed himself a dozen times in as many seconds, and then felt a little better.

Frank and the professor made their way up the river several hundred yards and shot quite a number of pigeons and pheasants.

Suddenly Frank had his hat knocked off his head by a stick, as he thought, but on looking around he saw that it was a boomerang.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, as he picked up the weapon. "That was as narrow an escape as I ever had! Where is the man who threw that?" and he glared around.

"As we can't see them," suggested the professor, "I think we had better run for it. They may pursue us, and if they do we can have a chance to fire on them."

"Well, come on. I don't like the idea of running from an enemy, though."

They ran about half way back toward the camp ere they discovered the natives.

About a dozen of them were dodging behind trees as they pushed on after the retreating whites.

Frank watched his chance to give one of them a bullet from his rifle—a genuine Winchester.

The savage went down with a yell, and the pursuit stopped for the moment. But it gave Frank and the professor just the time they wanted to reach the camp.

"Put everything in the carriage," said Frank, in very hurried tones. "The natives are coming!"

Barney and Pomp had everything back in the carriage in less than three minutes' time, with the steel net-work up and rifles in hand.

"Show me the dirty spalpeens," said Barney, looking about in every direction for a glimpse of the natives.

"Don't you fire till we are obliged to," said Frank. "We have no right to shoot 'em down like dogs unless they attack us."

"Why, they have done that already, Mr. Reade," said Bagstock, in no little surprise. "They came within an ace of killing you."

"Yes, so they did, but we have so much the advantage of them that it would be almost as bad as murder to use it against them."

"True—true—I never thought of that," said the professor. "Maybe they won't attack us now."

"Look dar!" exclaimed Pomp, pointing to a stick about two feet long, which was going up at an angle of about forty-five degrees from a clump of bushes on their right.

Frank and the Professor gazed at the stick as it ascended, and the latter exclaimed:

"That's a boomerang—look out!"

"It's gwine tudder way!" said Pomp, watching the boomerang's flight through the air.

"Yes, but it will come back again!" said Bagstock. "Here it comes now!"

The boomerang ascended so high that Frank saw that it had been thrown by a strong arm.

It stopped for a brief second of time when it reached the highest altitude, and then began to fall—as if perpendicularly—but when it acquired some momentum it began to perform some very peculiar gyrations, the result of which was a change of course.

Instead of following the laws of gravitation, as one would naturally expect, it made a dart for the Electric Man, striking him full on the breast with a force that would have felled an ox.

"The lor' gorrmighty!" gasped Pomp.

"Howly mither av Moses!" ejaculated Barney.

"That was a hard blow," said Frank, "but the old man can stand it, I guess."

"It would have broken the globe on his helmet though," remarked the Professor.

"Yes, so it would, but they seem to aim lower."

"Marse Frank," said Pomp, his eyes like saucers, "did dey frow dat stick at de 'lectric Man?"

"Yes."

"De Lor' sabs us!" groaned he, in distress of mind. "Dey kin hit a man behind a tree wid dat ar stick."

"Yes, or behind a house," remarked Bagstock, "and they are the only people in the world who know how to throw them."

"Dar goes anuder one!"

The second boomerang struck precisely where the other one did, after performing similar gyrations in the air, and was shattered against the solid steel it encountered.

CHAPTER VI.

ATTACKED BY THE NATIVES—THE RAFT.

"That is the most wonderful marksmanship I ever saw in my life," said Frank.

"Truly wonderful," the professor said, "and it is the result of mental mathematical calculation, too."

"Eh?"

"Mental mathematical calculation," repeated the professor. "The thrower looks at the object he wishes to hit, calculates the distance, and then calculates the angle and altitude that will be required to reach it—and he also considers the velocity of the wind at the same time."

"Wonderful! Marvelous!" exclaimed Frank. "There goes another!"

They watched the flight of the third boomerang and noted every gyration it made in the air.

It descended as the other had done and struck the Electric Man on the neck, breaking in two.

"That would have broken any man's neck!" said Bagstock.

"It would indeed—and no rifleman could have made a better shot. There goes another!"

The Electric Man again received a blow on the

neck, and the resounding whack could have been heard hundreds of yards away.

"Such an enemy is not to be despised," remarked Frank. "They are exceedingly dangerous. I see now that I must have moved a little after the boomerang was thrown at me, or I would have been killed."

"No doubt of it," said Bagstock. "They seldom miss. Sometimes a sudden gust of wind interferes with their aim after the weapon leaves their hand, but very rarely."

"Dar goes anuder one!" exclaimed Pomp, as another boomerang ascended from the bushes.

They watched its ascent and descent, to see it land on the roof of the carriage.

"That will do," said Frank. "I'll give 'em a scare now which may last them a long time," and he suddenly started up the electric current.

The Electric Man, as if to punish them for throwing sticks at him, made a dash at the clump of bushes from which the boomerang had been thrown.

The next moment, with peculiar yells, the half-dozen savages in that particular spot, dashed away through the woods.

"Don't fire!" cried Frank, as Barney leveled his gun at them.

Barney laid down the weapon with an expression of disgust on his face. He had no sympathy for the sentiment of humanity that filled Frank's breast at that moment.

"Bedad!" he said to himself, "it's soft-hearted fools we are when we let thim naygurs pound us an' rin away from us."

Suddenly a dozen sprang out of the bushes and rushed on the Electric Man with upraised clubs.

They evidently believed in the power of numbers, and had calculated that a dozen clubs well used would be too much for the big man who had defied their boomerangs.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank. "Fire! Quick!" He stopped the carriage and drew his revolver.

The others followed his example, and in about ten seconds a fusillade from the carriage caused the terror-stricken natives to dart away into the bushes again.

"Hanged if they can't beat rabbits at hiding in the bushes!" exclaimed Frank, as they disappeared from sight.

"Two of them are down, though," remarked the professor.

"Yes—so they are. Well, I am sorry for them. We may as well leave here now, as it would be as much as our lives are worth to get out of the carriage."

He started the Electric Man again, and guided him round to the left.

As they were in the forks of the two rivers, they decided to follow the one that had stopped them the night before and go up toward its source till they could find a crossing place.

The bushes prevented them from making fast time, and the day was gone ere they had made twenty miles.

"We must find a place for a camp," said Frank, looking around in the woods. "We want water, you know."

"I think we have been followed by the natives all day," remarked the professor.

"Why do you think so?" Reade asked, looking suspiciously around.

"Because we have been going slow enough for them to keep up with us."

"That's true. We shall have to be careful. They make less noise, and are more secretive than any savages I ever saw."

"We had better spend the night in the carriage," suggested Bagstock, "for then we run no risks."

"Yes, but we must have water," said Frank, "and when we find it we must fill up the tank so as to be always supplied in case of emergency."

They moved along at a moderate pace for another mile, and then found a spot where there were a number of springs boiling up at the foot of a rocky bluff.

Frank stopped alongside one of the springs, and then opened one of the chests which had done duty as seats in the day and berths at night, and took therefrom a coil of rubber tubing with a pump attachment.

He threw one end of the coil in the spring, and told Pomp to connect the other with the twenty-gallon tank under the chest.

Pomp made the connection and Frank set Barney to pumping.

In a half hour the tank was full and the pumping stopped.

"We are all right now, and ready for a siege," remarked Frank, as he ordered Barney to put the pump and tube away.

"Yes, for we have plenty to eat and drink now."

Frank moved away to a point where there was

a clearing for one or two hundred yards, and stopped in the center of it.

Pomp prepared supper of the canned provisions, and they made a good meal, after which they lit their cigars and indulged in talk and smoke till bed time.

At the usual hour they all four rolled in their berths and went to sleep, knowing that the least interference with the Electric Man would wake them up.

About an hour after midnight Pomp woke up to get a drink of water. He was burning up with thirst.

But, though it was very dark, he saw shadowy objects moving all round the carriage, and noises that sounded not unlike whispers.

"Dem native niggers," he thought to himself, and he reached over and shook Frank by the shoulder.

That awoke him, and in another minute he saw the same objects that had attracted Pomp's attention moving about in the darkness.

He shook the professor, and whispered in his ear:

"Get up, the natives are all around us!"

The professor did as he was told, and Pomp called up Barney the same way.

"Just have your revolvers ready," Frank whispered to them. "I am going to turn on the lights, and while they are blinded by the glare we can give 'em a volley that'll make 'em let us alone."

At a given signal Frank turned on the electric lights, and the glare of them completely knocked the natives out—of whom there were at least a hundred or more.

They were so blinded that they could see nothing but the lights.

"Now let 'em have it!" cried Frank, and the fusillade began.

In an instant the howls commenced, and each wounded native added to the din.

But ere the last revolver was emptied, the dark-skinned natives had vanished into the bushes.

Not one, save those who had fallen, could be seen.

"Now we shall have to move," said Frank.

The lights enabled them to move away from the spot, and a half-mile beyond they struck an open plain stretching away northward.

Away they went at the rate of twenty miles an hour, which they kept up for an hour and a half.

"We can stop now, I guess," said Frank, "and finish our nap."

He put out the lights, and soon they were soundly sleeping again.

When the sun arose they were out of sight of mountain or forest.

But they resumed the north-westerly course they wished to go, and kept it up till late in the afternoon, when they struck timber and water again.

It was a river—not very long, but quite swift and deep.

They skirted it for twenty miles looking for a crossing place.

But they found none.

"There's no use wasting any more time on it," said Frank. "We've got to build a raft if we get across."

"Can we do that?" Bagstock asked.

"Easily. Here's plenty of timber, and we have axes on board."

"Dat's er fae," said Pomp, going for the axes, which he brought out.

He and Barney went to work cutting up the logs which were found all along the river bank, whilst Frank and Professor Bagstock procured grape vine with which to tie them together.

Three days were spent in the job, at the end of which time a strong raft had been finished. It was tied securely to the bank, and the Electric Man and carriage guided on to it with great care.

Then the wheels were lashed to the logs to prevent accidents.

Being thus prepared for the venture, they procured long poles, and pushed off from the bank, and were soon out in the current of the stream.

The current carried them down stream nearly a half mile ere they could strike the other side. But the shore being too marshy for them to land, they pushed off again.

Down the stream they floated, looking continuously for a favorable place to land. But mile after mile was passed, and still no good landing was found.

Suddenly they espied a dozen canoes filled with natives coming toward them.

"Now we've got to fight for it!" cried Frank. "Keep 'em off the raft, or they'll sink us. Inside, quick, and get your arms!"

They sprang inside the carriage, and in another minute the four rifles were protruding

from the sides. The natives made a dash for the raft as the rifles blazed forth.

CHAPTER VII.

BATTLE OF THE RAFT—CAPTURE OF A NATIVE.

The situation was one of the gravest peril to our heroes.

There were about a dozen canoes, each of which held from four to six natives.

The Electric Man was the object of their aim, for the others had found safety in the carriage where neither boomerangs or spears could reach them.

It was evident that they regarded the Electric Man as a human being with a peculiar armor on.

They hurled spears at him.

But the weapons rang against the steel and fell harmlessly on the raft at his feet, to their utter amazement.

Then those in the carriage opened fire, and the nearest canoe was emptied in a trice.

Unless knocked out instantly a native would plunge into the water to swim ashore as soon as he was hit.

Barney yelled with every shot as if he enjoyed the picnic, and his shots created such havoc that the natives became bewildered.

Frank and the others were equally as destructive in their fire, and the blacks suffered dreadfully.

Suddenly they seized their oars and pulled away as if panic-stricken, and Frank instantly ordered his party to stop firing.

The natives landed in some tall grass and water trees, and pulling their light canoes after them, disappeared from sight altogether.

"We made a narrow escape that time," said Frank, looking in their direction.

"Yes," said the professor, "it was a close call."

"Had they crowded on the raft," as I was afraid they would, they would have upset it, and then we would have been drowned, locked up in here."

"De Lor' sabe us!" gasped Pomp.

"It was a wise thing to lash the wheels to the raft," remarked Bagstock.

"Yes, a lucky one, at least."

"Did you notice Barney in the fight?" Bagstock asked.

"Yes, I've seen 'em both in some desperate fights, and know that I can depend on them when danger threatens."

"He really seemed to enjoy it."

"He did enjoy it. Barney had rather be in a ruction than preside at a feast. Eh, Barney?"

"Bedad!" returned Barney, "av the spalpeens wants ter foight, I'm not mane enough ter disappoint 'em. Faith, an' they don't have much fun, I'm thinkin'."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "De fun was all on our side."

"Yez are roight, Pomp, but av they get us in ther grip it's fun galore they'd have wid us."

"Better die fighting than fall into their hands," said Frank. "Yet I would never be able to get over it if one of you should get killed by such miserable creatures as these natives are."

"Isn't it a singular phase of savage nature that he should always seek to slay his species when not of his own tribe?"

"Yes. I have often thought of it," replied Frank. "They seem to have the same feelings toward other races as all men have toward the serpent."

"Exactly. It is a singular feature or characteristic of savage life," remarked the professor, floated down the stream for many miles, looking for a good place to land.

But about noon they struck on a sand bar, and lodged there.

"We may as well remain here as anywhere," said Frank, "as one place is as good as another. I think we can find good landing where there is a sand bar."

They found themselves a half mile from shore, either way.

The river had spread out a mile wide over a bed of sand like a shallow lake.

"There must be plenty of fish here," said the professor, "as we can see them rippling the water everywhere."

"Get your tackle, Pomp, and see what kind of fish they are," Frank ordered, and the faithful darky did as he was told.

He baited his hook with scraps of meat, and landed a species of perch about as fast as he could keep it baited.

"This is good sport, at any rate," said Frank. "Catch enough for dinner, and then clean them. Barney, wade out toward the bank there, and see how deep the water is, and note the bottom, to see if it is hard enough to allow us to go ashore."

Barney stripped and started out to wade ashore.

He found the water warm, and from ten to fifteen inches deep all the way, with a smooth, hard, sandy bottom.

The banks were low and sandy, stretching away in the distance in a low plain.

"Faith!" he exclaimed, as he looked away westward, "we can be after making fast toime out there."

When he returned he reported what he had found, and then Frank went over the route to make sure about the bottom of the river.

To make a mistake and lose the Electric Man and carriage would be equivalent to losing their lives, and he did not propose to take any unnecessary risks in attempting to cross the stream.

But he found that Barney had made no mistake and so he came back and ordered Pomp to cut the grape-vines that held the wheels to the raft.

Pomp cut them and then they all entered the carriage.

"Steady now!" called Frank, "steady now, old man," and he started the machinery in motion.

The Electric Man stepped boldly off into the water.

His great weight caused him to sink nearly up to his knees in the water, but that did not deter him in the least.

He stepped forward and pulled the carriage along as if he was walking on dry land.

"This is a right," said Frank.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp. "Dere ain't no dust heah."

"Nor mud either," remarked the Professor.

"Plinty av wather, though," put in Barney.

"Very good for you three," said Frank, laughing. "Make some more funny remarks."

"I'm exhausted," replied Bagstock.

"I thought so. We'll brace up when we get out there on that level plain."

They soon reached the white sand beach, and then stopped near a large log which had been thrown up there by some great freshet.

"Take your axes and make a good fire there," said Frank. "I want some fried fish for breakfast."

Barney and Pomp soon had a roaring fire going, and then the savory odor of frying fish gave them an appetite for all they could get to eat.

While the fish were cooking, Frank looked to the water-tank and saw that it could hold a few gallons more.

He used the hose and pump and soon had it full.

"We might not strike any more good water for a week," he said, "and it's something one can't do without."

Pomp announced dinner when it was ready, and they fell to and did ample justice to the fried fish, which they thought was as fine as any they had ever eaten.

Just as they had finished the meal, Barney discovered at least half a hundred natives creeping toward them in the tall grass which lined the river-bank.

"Come, let's be off," said Frank. "We'll chase 'em awhile and give 'em a good scare."

They scrambled into the carriage, and Frank started straight for the natives in the tall grass.

On seeing the Electric Man coming for them, the natives sprang up and ran for all they were worth.

"There they go," laughed the professor.

"Yes. I am going to run down one of them and catch him," said Frank. "I want to see one of them when he can't do any mischief."

He selected one of the fastest runners in the band and made after him.

But the fellow saw his peril and plunged into the river to swim across.

They chased another, and succeeded in getting between him and the river.

That demoralized the savage, and he started off from the river at full speed.

Frank did not crowd him too close, but kept near enough to him to keep him doing his best.

A mile after mile was passed, and still the native ran at full speed.

"His bottom is good," said Frank.

"Yes—long-winded, I should say," remarked the professor.

"I would like to know just how long he can keep that rate of speed up," Frank said. "If he can run fifty miles without stopping I'll give him a medal."

The others laughed.

Then Pomp yelled at him, and the native actually increased his speed.

"He's doing well."

They ran him an hour longer, and then it was plain to be seen that the fellow was giving out.

"I'd like to stop him before he is broken down completely. You had better get your lasso and

make ready to throw it from the top of the carriage, Pomp."

"Yes, sah," said Pomp, who at once began a search for the rope in one of the chests.

"Hold on—he is down!"

The savage had fallen flat on his face on the grass, and lay like a dead man.

He could run no further.

He had given up exhausted.

The Electric Man stopped alongside of him and Frank and Pomp got out to take a look at and disarm him.

Pomp picked up his spear, club and boomerang, all three of which he had held on to to the last.

He was naked from head to foot and was quite a well built fellow.

His feet were large and very hard and dirty.

His skin was very dark, though not quite as black as Pomp's, but his hair was very curly, though not kinky, showing that he did not belong to the negro race.

"Stand him up on his feet, Pomp," Frank ordered, and Pomp proceeded to do so.

"De lor' gorrarnighly, Marse Frank," Pomp exclaimed, "he am skeered almos' ter def!"

"Tell him we won't hurt him."

"Look heah, nigger! We ain't gwine ter hurt yer," said Pomp, standing him on his feet and turning him around so as to have him face the others.

The savage trembled like a leaf from head to foot and spoke in guttural sounds which were about as intelligible as the grunts of the ground hog.

He was evidently pleading for his life, for the moment he was let go he threw himself on his face at Frank's feet.

"Take his boomerang and leave him the club and spear," said Frank, "and let him go. We can't get anything out of him."

Pomp obeyed, and then they entered the carriage and dashed away in a northwesterly direction.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SWIFT-FOOTED EMU.

THEY were a mile away from the native ere he raised his head to look around.

The moment he saw that he was alone and unharmed he sprang to his feet and went through a series of most extraordinary antics.

He leaped in the air, landed on his hands, rolled over on the grass and let out a few yells that reached even the receding Electric Man.

"He is a happy man, no doubt," said the professor, laughing heartily at the fellow's performances.

"No doubt of it," added Frank. "He believed he was to be killed, and his surprise and joy are too much for him. And yet he may even think that we were actually afraid of him."

"Yes, and that we are running away from him."

"Bedad!" said Barney, "let me go back an' tache him a lisson."

"Oh, let him alone. He is nothing but a wild man, and doesn't know any better."

"Faith, an' I'll tache him betther. I'll tame him wid me fist."

"You'll find plenty more to tame before we get back home again," remarked Frank. "Don't worry, old man."

"Sure, an' it's not the loikes av me as worry about it," replied Barney.

They soon left the native out of sight and went scudding over the level, grassy plain at the rate of fifteen or twenty miles an hour.

The surface of the earth was as level as a floor, with not even a bunch of grass thicker in one place than in another to make a jar.

"It is like riding over a carpet," remarked the professor.

"Yes. We could soon cross the island if we had such ground as this to travel over," replied Frank.

"Of course. But we'll strike the sand plains beyond the next range of hills or mountains, and then our trouble will come."

"But we can travel over sand as well as on hard ground, though not so fast."

"But there are boulders of rock everywhere, I am told."

"We can dodge those, you know."

"Yes, but it's trying, I guess."

"No doubt of that. What a splendid pasture for sheep this would be!"

"Splendid. I never saw better pasturage in my life," said Bagstock.

"I presume it is too far inland for it to be used for many years yet."

"Yes. We have come some two or three hundred miles, have we not?"

"Yes."

"Dis heah am er big paster," remarked Pomp, as he looked around at the boundless expanse of green succulent grass.

Just then he espied a lot of emus in the distance, the ostrich of Australia.

"Look dar, Marse Frank. Dem's de birds dat run ober Barney!"

Frank turned the carriage in that direction, and made for them.

The big birds evidently did not see the carriage till it was in a quarter of a mile of them, and then they started off on a run in a body.

"Now for a race! Get your rifles ready!" cried Frank, as he put on an extra spurt of electricity.

The Electric Man made tremendous strides, and went over the greensward like a cyclone.

Barney and Pomp got their Winchester ready for use, and waited for a chance to draw a bead.

Away the great birds went, getting over ground as fast as race-horses.

But the Electric Man never got out of wind, and by and by his steady gait began to tell.

He was gaining on them.

Oh, how they pulled!

They seemed to do their level best, and to encourage each other.

But gradually they came within range of the deadly Winchester, and Barney and Pomp both fired.

One was evidently hit, for he made a bound of several feet, but continued his speed.

"Give 'em another!"

Crack—crack!

"Give 'em another!"

Crack—crack!

"Another!"

Crack—crack!

Three of the great birds now began to show signs of weakness by staggering as they ran.

"They are hard to kill," remarked the professor.

"Yes, so they are; but several are hit, I think."

Crack—crack!

One dropped, with his neck broken, and he lay on the grass kicking as vigorously as a horse.

"That will do," said Frank. "Don't waste any more cartridges."

"Dar's anuder one down!" cried Pomp, as one of the wounded ones staggered and fell.

"There's another one almost ready to drop, too," remarked the professor, watching another big fellow staggering along.

They reached the first one that fell and found him quite dead. Pomp picked him up and exclaimed:

"Dat's de biggest bird I eber see. We ain't got no pan big enough ter fry him in."

"Cut it up for beef," suggested Frank, who took hold of him, and mentally calculated his weight to be seventy-five or eighty pounds.

"One beef like dat 'ud last us all er whole week," replied Pomp.

"Bedad, but it's tough afe, I'm afther thinking," remarked Barney, as he looked curiously at the dead bird.

"Why, it's a young chicken, you gossoon," said Frank, turning suddenly on the Irishman.

"Faith, thin, deliver me from the ould hin av that's only a chick."

And he devoutly crossed himself as he spoke, at which Frank and Bagstock laughed heartily.

Pomp took up the dead bird and was about to throw it into the carriage when Frank told him to leave it where it was.

"It's rather too large to fry, I guess," he added.

"Dat's er fac'," remarked Pomp, as he dropped it at his feet.

They entered the carriage once more and resumed their journey. But in a little while they began to run into immense flocks of quail.

"Now take your shot-guns," said Frank, "and gather in as many as you can. There's no better eating than quail."

Barney, Pomp and Bagstock took their shot-guns and began a fusillade on the quail.

They were so numerous that in a few minutes half a hundred had fallen.

"Gather them up and throw them in here," said Frank, "and to-night and for several days we can feast on quail."

They were gathered in, and a big pile they made.

Frank then continued on the way they had started, and many a mile was passed over ere they made another halt.

"What a stretch of grazing country," Bagstock remarked, as he gazed at the illimitable expanse of grass.

"Yes, I was just thinking about that. But I suppose the natives are the main obstacle in the way of their use as pasturage."

"Yes, and the distance, too."

By and by they came in sight of a stretch of low timber in the distance.

"That must be another water course," remarked Frank.

"Undoubtedly, but there is no mention of it on the maps."

"Then we have come farther than the map-makers?"

"It would seem so."

"Well, we'll soon see what it is."

In another hour they came to a stream that flowed south-west, whilst their route was north-west.

"We will have to cross here somewhere, or get out of our way again," said Frank.

"It is not a very large stream," remarked Bagstock. "I think we may be able to ford it hereabouts."

"It is very plain that we can't do it here. The banks on either side are marshy."

They found the river crowded with water fowl of every description, and an hour was spent in shooting them, during which time scores of them were killed.

"We must be off," said Frank, "as the other side is better adapted for camping than this one."

They re-entered the carriage and rode a few miles up stream, when they found a place where the bed of the river was very shallow and the sand quite firm.

Barney and Pomp both waded across and first ascertained whether or not it was safe to make the attempt to drive over.

But on their report Frank resolved to try it, and boldly headed for the center of the stream.

Barney and Pomp remained on the other side till the carriage came over, and then a consultation was held as to whether they should go on then, or camp there for the night, and take a fresh start the next day.

They agreed to camp there on account of the water, and because the day was two-thirds gone already. Barney and Pomp went to work to collect drift wood enough to make as much fire as they would need, after which they proceeded to clean and prepare the half a hundred quails they had brought with them.

It took them some time to dress them all, but they stuck to the task till it was done.

Then they proceeded to broil them all, to be eaten as needed.

In the meantime Frank and the professor tried their luck at fishing.

But they cast their lines a dozen times without getting a nibble.

"There's no fish here," said Frank.

"I am inclined to that opinion too," remarked the professor.

"There must be something the matter with the water," said Frank. "A stream like this ought to be full of fish, particularly when there are no fishermen about."

"This is one of the streams that dry up occasionally," said the professor, "or rather loses itself in the great sand plains."

"Ah! and the rains start it up again! I recollect reading about them. Of course fish could not live and propagate in such streams. We have come a good ways into the interior of the island. I don't know how far we have come, but we must have traveled several hundred miles."

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE ARID PLAINS—A STRANGE MEETING.

THEY remained by the unknown river that night and feasted on the quails which Pomp knew so well how to prepare.

"I am curious to know if there are any natives about this part of the country," said Frank, as the stars began to come out. "I don't want to have any boomerangs flying round our heads."

"I am quite sure there are none," replied Bagstock, after a moment's pause.

"Why not here as anywhere else?"

"Because there are no fish in this stream."

"Correct!" exclaimed Frank. "I never thought of that, but I can see the good reason for your opinion. I have no idea that there is a native within fifty miles of us to-night."

"Nor have I."

"Begorra!" exclaimed Barney, "we won't have any ruction to-night, Pomp."

"I see glad ob dat, honey," replied Pomp. "Dis heah chile don't want no ruction."

"Are you spoiling for a fight, Barney?" Bagstock asked.

"Sure, an' I wouldn't moind havin' a wee bit av a shindy wid ther spalpeens," replied Barney.

"You had better let 'em alone. They are dangerous, even though very great cowards."

"Bedad, an' it's meself that's dangerous, too," he replied.

"So you are, but it's a safe rule never to hunt

round for a fight. They come often enough in this life without we being under the necessity of meeting them half way."

"That's the best advice you have had in a year, Barney," said Frank, laughing, "and I want you to heed it. You have always been too willing to engage in strife. Some day, if you don't curb your fondness for a ruction, Pomp and I may have to dig a hole for you somewhere thousands of miles away from home."

"Bedad, but would yez have me be a coward?"

"Oh, no. I am not a coward, am I?"

"Well, you don't see me getting into rows on small provocations, do you?"

"No, sorr."

"Well, just keep cool as I do, and you'll get on in the world much more peaceably."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"Phwat the ould Nick is it to you, yer naygur!" retorted Barney, who could not bear to have Pomp join in the lecture against him.

"There you go, now!" said Frank, laughing. "Pomp simply indorsed my sentiments and you turn round and insult him. You know that Pomp can lick you any day in the year—"

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, springing to his feet and throwing off his coat. "Ould Ireland for-iver! Show me the naygur as kin stand up wid Barney O'Shea, an' be the powers I'll bate the hid off av him."

Pomp sat quietly on his camp-stool and grinned at Barney as if he considered him the funniest thing he had seen since he left home.

"Pat on yer coat, honey," he said to the Irishman. "I ain't er gwine ter hurt yer."

That was too much for Barney to patiently bear.

He pranced around like a turkey on a hot floor, and whooped like a Comanche Indian.

"Keep quiet, you fool!" sternly ordered Frank, "or I'll put you in a straight jacket."

Barney walked off down to the water's edge to let his anger cool, and the professor asked:

"Did he and Pomp ever fight?"

"More than a hundred times," replied Frank.

"And is Pomp the better man of the two?"

"They are even matched till Pomp butts him. Then Barney is knocked out. They have fought above the clouds in an air-ship, and down under the sea—in every quarter of the globe, and yet they love each other like brothers. They have saved each other's life repeatedly at the risk of their own. Yet Barney is always ready to fight at a word."

When Barney came back from the water, he was over his passion, and as pleasant as usual. He lit his pipe, and indulged in a smoke before going to bed.

As a measure of safety, they all slept in the carriage, where no native boomerang throwers could reach them.

When they awoke in the morning, the sun was just rising, giving promise of a cloudless day.

Pomp soon had breakfast prepared, and they did ample justice to it.

"Now, let's see to the water tank," said Frank, for I've an idea that we may not see another stream in the next thousand miles.

"De Lor' sabe us!" exclaimed Pomp, his eyes wide open, and a scared look in his face.

"Bedad, thin, it's dry we'll be forinist we get back, I'm thinkin'," remarked Barney.

"Yes," said Frank, "we shall be on short rations for water, but if we don't waste any we'll have enough to see us through."

They filled the tank and two pails with water from the stream, and then started out in the north-westerly direction.

For many miles they noticed the vegetation growing poorer and scantier. The grass was a species of tough wire grass, which reached down under the rocks and thus drew moisture enough to save life.

But the trees dwindled down to bushes, not unlike apple trees in size and appearance, and they recognized what some travelers had called "apple tree flats."

"This is poor grazing ground," remarked Bagstock.

"Yes," said Frank. "Even the native animals shun it and seek other and greener pastures."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp. "I doan see what folks want ter lib heah for, no how."

"Do you see any people round here?" Frank asked, looking at the darky with a quizzical expression on his face.

"No, sah, but dere am fools enough ter come heah," was the reply of the faithful old man.

"Pomp is right," observed the professor. "If gold should be discovered hereabouts in paying quantities there would soon be a big crowd of people rushing to the spot."

"Oh, of course. Gold will draw people in worse places than this."

By this time the rocks were becoming so numerous that Frank had to exercise the utmost vigilance to avoid striking against them.

Of course their speed had to be slackened, and more care taken in the management of the Electric Man.

An accident in that unpleasant section would entail no end of trouble and danger to them.

The day passed, and they came in sight of a range of low mountains, which at first glance did not seem to present any very formidable obstacles to their progress.

But between them and the mountains lay an arid waste of many miles, and an hour's traveling did not seem to bring them any nearer the hills.

"They are a long ways off yet," said Frank, as twilight cut off the view; "but I want to reach their base before stopping for the night."

"You'll have to look sharp for stones if you travel after dark," remarked Bagstock.

"Yes, but the electric light will give us as much aid for that purpose as the sun itself," and he touched the knob that lighted the Electric Man's helmet and eyes.

"Oh, that's so; we can see even the smallest stones by that light!"

They pushed on mile after mile, and the surrounding darkness had grown intense in the extreme.

"What a terrible solitude this is," said Frank. "Not a sound of any kind breaks the awful stillness, no animal or insect life—not even a breath of wind to blow among the stones."

"It is awful," commented Bagstock.

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp.

They pushed on for another hour, and then Pomp sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"Fore de Lor', Marse Frank, I heerd a man holler out dere in de dark."

"What! A man holler?"

"Yes, sah."

"I never heard anything," said the professor, shaking his head.

Frank looked at Barney, then at Pomp.

"Did you hear anything, Barney?" he asked.

"No, sorr."

"You must have been mistaken," said Bagstock, looking at Pomp.

"No, sah; dese heak ears doan' fool dis chile," replied Pomp.

"Which way was it?"

"Out dere," and Pomp pointed a little to the right of the course they were going.

"I'll go that way," said Frank, "for I know what good ears he has. I've known him to have heard sounds when not one of us heard anything at all."

They changed their course a little to the right, and when they had gone a half mile they were startled by a yell, and the words in English:

"Oh, Lord! what is it?"

They all heard the words, and they were followed by groans as of some one in despair.

Frank stopped the carriage and listened.

Groans came to them as if from behind a bowlder of rock nearly in front of them.

"Give me that Winchester," said Frank. "I am going out there to see what it means."

He took the rifle from Pomp's hands and Barney opened the door for him to get out.

He started toward the bowlder, rifle held ready for instant use in case of emergency.

Ere he had advanced half way he saw a tall, gaunt figure of a man, clothed in rags, with long, unkempt beard and hair, stagger from behind the bowlder, drop on his knees, extend two long, bony arms toward him, and cry out:

"Oh, for the love of God, spare me—save me—whatever you are!"

CHAPTER X.

THE CONVICT'S STORY.

FRANK glared at the man in the profoundest amazement as he knelt there with outstretched arms. He seemed the picture of woe and gaunt starvation.

"How many of you are here?" he asked.

"I am the only one. I don't know if my comrades are yet alive," was the reply. "For God's sake give me food and water!"

"Bring him some water, Pomp," Frank ordered.

"Yes, sah," and Pomp descended from the carriage with a pint cup full of water in his hand.

The man staggered to his feet and darted toward Pomp with outstretched hands and an eager look in his haggard face.

He clutched the cup with both hands and pressed it to his lips.

"Be slow now," cautioned Frank, "or you may injure yourself. We have more water, but you want to drink slow."

But before the words had all left Frank's lips

the man emptied the cup, and, with a long-drawn sigh of relief, said, as he gave it back to Pomp:

"You have saved my life."

"Dat's er fac', honey," said Pomp, whose sympathies were stirred up from their deepest depths.

"Give me food! give me food!" pleaded the man. "My God! I am starving to death!"

"Give him some biscuit and a quail," said Frank, and Barney came out with the food in his hands.

The man eagerly snatched them and began devouring them with ravenous haste.

"Be careful. Eat slowly and a little at a time," cautioned Frank again.

But the man ate like a famished wolf. Words of caution were wasted on him. He finished what had been given him, and cried out:

"I am starving! Give me more! For God's sake give me food!"

"Not now," said Frank. "You would kill yourself within an hour were you to eat all you craved."

The man had the wild look of a half-famished wolf as he glanced at the carriage from which had come the water and food.

Suddenly he darted toward the vehicle with the speed of a deer, but Barney promptly seized him by the waist and held him.

"Let me go! Give me food! I am starving!"

"Be aisy now," said Barney, who held him as

he were but a ten-year-old boy.

He was so reduced that a boy of fifteen could have held him.

"Be aisy wid yer," said Barney. "Whin the masher says ye can have more yez can have it, but not before."

"But I am starving," persisted the man, a wild, eager look in his eyes.

"Be aisy now; yez are not did yit."

"You can have more in a few minutes," said Frank. "If I wanted to kill you I'd just turn you loose on all you could get away with, and within an hour you'd be a dead man. Just wait now till you get the benefit of what you have just eaten."

"But I haven't eaten a thing in a week. I am starving."

"You are not starving now," said Frank.

"You have just had a pint of water and a quail on buisect. That will last you for a half hour, after which you can have another pint and a quail."

The man sank down on the ground with a groan, and looked around at the men who had allowed him to taste again the hope of life.

"Who are you?" Frank asked, as he stood over the man and looked down at him.

"My name is Varley," said the man, as he looked first at one and then at the other of the men who had saved his life.

"Where are you from?"

"I came from England several years ago, and have lived in New South Wales ever since."

"What are you doing away out here all alone?"

"I came out in quest of gold, which we heard could be had in the mountains just for the coming."

"How many were in your party?"

"There were thirteen of us, but I don't know how many are alive now."

"When did you leave them?"

"A week ago. I wandered away from them in the darkness of night, and when morning came I could not find them any more. As they had no food or water, they may be all dead by this time."

"Did you find any gold?" Professor Bagstock asked.

"Yes, plenty of it. The richest quartz in the mountains back there can be found as common as these stones; but what is gold when it cannot bring food nor drink?"

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, who was deeply interested in the man's story.

"Yes—Oh, give me just a sup more of water! My lips are too dry for talking!"

"Give him another pint, Pomp," Frank ordered, and Pomp brought it to him.

He drank it as eagerly as he did the first one, and said, as he gave back the cup:

"How sweet—oh, how good—ad sweet it is!"

"How long did your party remain near the mountains where the gold was found?" Frank asked.

"Till our provisions gave out. Then we thought we might find game of some kind, but nothing that could fly, run or swim could we find. Then we had to leave everything and start back. My God, how we suffered! Words can't describe what we endured, sir. We were almost ready to fall on and eat each other up. Something told me one night that if I would get up and go off by myself I would find food and water. I did so, not knowing or caring which

way I went, and after a week of suffering such as words cannot describe I came here. Who are you? Where are you going?"

"We are going over that mountain and beyond it," said Frank.

"My God!" gasped the man. "Beyond is nothing but a wild waste of sand as large as the ocean. Don't go! It's death on the other side."

"We are prepared to take the chances on that," said Frank. "Can we get over the mountains?"

"You might climb over, for they are nothing but rock piled upon rock."

"No vegetation of any kind?"

"Not even a bit of moss on the rocks," was the reply.

"Did you have any weapons?"

"Yes, but I must have dropped 'em somewhere—I don't know where."

"Well, you were in a bad way indeed, for had you succeeded in getting to where there were game and water the boomerangs would have finished you."

"Yes—yes. They will all perish."

"You have no idea which way your comrades went, have you?"

"No. I have no idea which way I have come myself. Have you a drop of spirits you could give me?"

"Barney, give him an ounce of brandy," ordered Frank, and Barney proceeded to the carriage to execute the order.

He opened the medicine-chest and poured from a bottle just one ounce of brandy into a measuring glass, then emptied it into the pint cup and carried it out to him.

He drank it eagerly, and then broke forth into the most profuse volley of thanks.

"You have saved my life," he said, "and you can have it to do with as you please. Make me one of your servants—your dog, if you wish—only let me prove my gratitude to you. I have suffered so much that the memory of it will stay with me while life lasts."

"How long have you been in Australia?"

"Nearly twenty years. I was transported for life and—"

"What! A convict!"

"Yes, sir, but an innocent man for all that," said the man earnestly.

"They all say that. I am sorry for you, sir," said Frank, shaking his head.

"But I can give you corroborative proof of my innocence, sir," said the man.

"Why did you not have your proof in the court that convicted and sentenced you?"

"Because I was very young then and did not know as much as I do now. I escaped from Tasmania two years ago, and have lived in the bush ever since, trying to pick up gold enough to buy my passage to America, and then on over to England."

"What was the crime charged against you?"

"Murder—a man was killed and when he was found a knife belonging to me was found in his bosom. That was all the evidence that was brought against me. Another man now bears my title and enjoys the wealth that is justly mine. Their hope was to get me hanged, but they failed in that and I was transported."

"You have had a hard time of it," said Reade, "but we won't leave you to starve. We'll take care of you till we can drop you where you can take care of yourself."

"Oh, thank you a thousand times, you have saved my life."

"Are the others who were with you convicts, too?"

"Yes—I believe they all are. I kept my record a secret, and some of them may have done the same."

"Yes—yes—no doubt of it at all; but never mind. We'll do our best to save them. There were twelve of them when you left, did you say?"

"Yes, sir—twelve. But two or three surely must have perished before this, for they were very weak when I left them. I don't see how they could have lived till now."

"Nevertheless, we will hope for the best. We'll camp here for the night and begin the search in the morning. At night we cannot see beyond the range of the electric light."

They then stretched the tent and camped there without any fire, the convict sleeping on the ground, as he had been doing for years, perhaps.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUNT FOR THE STARVING PARTY.

WHEN Pomp awoke the next morning, a little before sunrise, he found the convict, Varley, standing before the Electric Man gazing at him with an expression of awe and curiosity on his haggard face.

He watched for some minutes, and then asked:

"What you tink ob dat, chile?"

"What is it?" Varley asked.

"Dat's er Eluetric Man."

"What's that?"

"Er man what runs by lightnin'."

"Run by lightning?"

"Yes, chile."

The convict had been well educated in his early youth, and knew how to use the queen's English pretty well, but he had not kept up with the march of science since his transportation, and had never heard of Frank Reade, Sr. or Jr., and their wonderful inventions. He had never before heard that electricity, the very essence of the lightning, of which the world stood in awe as it flashed from the black summer clouds, being bottled and controlled in the interest of science before, and the idea seemed incredible to him.

He looked at Pomp in a way that plainly told what was passing in his mind.

Pomp grinned and said:

"You don't believ that, chile, but you jes' wait an' youse'll know mo'n yer do now."

Just then the others awoke, and all arose to prepare for the morning meal.

The first thing Frank did was to get his field-glass and mount the top of the carriage to scan the horizon in every direction in quest of the comrades of the convict.

"I can't see anything with the semblance of life," he said to Bagstock, who was watching him with considerable interest.

"Then we had better move on toward the mountains and keep up a watch as we go," suggested the professor.

"Yes. Did you come from that direction, Varley?" Frank asked the convict, pointing toward the mountains.

"Yes, sir," the man replied.

"Well, the others can't be very far off, then, I guess."

They ate heartily of the quail, of which they still had a good supply, and gave a double quantity to the rescued man.

The food he had eaten the night before had made a wonderful change in him, and he showed signs of returning vitality to a remarkable degree.

"You'll be yourself again in a few days," said Frank, as he saw the change a little wholesome food and drink had made in him.

"I hope so, for then I shall be able to do something in return for what you have done for me."

"There may not be anything for you to do," returned Frank, "but if there should be, every man is expected to do his part of whatever is to be done."

"You'll find me willing to do my share, sir, and more, too, if necessary," returned Varley.

The meal over, Frank ordered Barney to get on top of the carriage with the field glass, and keep a lookout for the party supposed to be wandering around somewhere on the verge of starvation.

"Please allow me to perform that duty, Mr. Reade," said the professor. "It may give me some idea of the topography of the country, which otherwise I might not get."

"Certainly, professor. If you wish it I have no objection. Barney, give the glass to the professor."

Barney gave the field glass to Bagstock, who immediately climbed to the top of the carriage and settled down to the task he had taken on himself.

When the Electric Man started off on a brisk trot at the rate of ten miles an hour, where the way was free from stones, Varley sprang to his feet and stared as if his eyes would pop out of his head.

His astonishment was so great that he could not find words in which to express it.

"Did you make that man?" he finally asked Frank.

"Yes," was the reply.

"I wonder you have not managed to fly. Such a genius ought to make a flying-machine."

Frank, Barney and Pomp all gave a smile that had a world of meaning, but which he did not understand.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked.

"I have flown around the world," replied Frank, "at an average height of half a mile above the surface of the earth. Flying is old now."

The convict glared at him in surprise, whilst a look of incredulity came into his eyes.

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

He looked at the Electric Man again, and then said:

"I believe you. The man who can make such a thing as that out there can make anything he wants to."

"Not quite," replied Frank laughing. "There is a limit. I know several things I would like to make, but can't."

The mountains became more distinct every hour now, and the party could begin to distinguish some of the rugged outlines of the immense boulders along the range.

Still the professor could not find any traces of the lost twelve men he was looking for, and he began to think that the poor fellows had perished from starvation.

"Those mountains will be hard to get over," he called out to Reade as they went bounding on toward them. "I have been looking at them, and they seem to me to be impassable by anything like this conveyance."

"Yes, it would seem so," replied Frank, "but we'll skirt them till we find a passage over them somewhere. We have plenty of time, and are within two days' run of water and game."

"Have you thought of the effect of the finding of those twelve men alive, Mr. Reade?"

"Yes—it will reduce our supplies very low, but we shall save so many human lives."

"Yes—and that is the only thing to be considered."

"Yes, the only thing."

By and by they got so near to the mountains that great stones blocked their way in many places, and Frank had to drive with extreme caution to prevent accidents.

"These are the mountains," said Varley, "and beyond them the most arid plains in the world—nothing but sand—not a sprig of vegetation of any kind."

"How much of those plains have you seen?"

"Only so much as could be seen from the top of the mountain, but that seemed to be fifty miles or more."

"How did you get up there?"

"By climbing."

"Where did you find the gold you speak of?"

"In broken fragments of rock all along on the mountain. There's no end of it, but we had no tools with which to crush the quartz."

"Yes, so you had to leave it all behind you."

"Of course—but though it might have lain about us in solid lumps we would have been compelled to leave it, for hunger outweighed every other consideration."

It was true.

All that a man has he will give for his life, and the experience of many a pioneer has proved it in all ages.

"Do you know at what particular point you saw the gold bearing rocks?"

"Yes—if I could see it again I am sure I would know it. Just keep on down this way and we'll run across it soon, I think."

Frank turned in that direction, and guided the Electric Man among the stones with a consummate skill till over twenty miles had been passed over.

Suddenly the professor called out:

"I see men's tracks here!"

"Ah! This is where we left the mountains to walk across the plains in search of water and food," said Varley as he glanced around. "We traveled in the night because it was cooler."

"Then we'll follow the trail," said Frank, "till we know what became of them."

The trail was easily followed, and as they receded from the mountains the way was smoother, and hence the speed faster.

After mile after mile was passed and still nothing but the trail could be seen.

Bagstock kept a sharp lookout from the roof of the carriage, and just before sunset he sung out:

"I can see small objects in the distance which look like men."

"Let me have a look at them," said Frank, climbing out and up on the roof.

Then he snatched the glass from Bagstock's hands, and leveled it at the objects mentioned.

"Yes—they are men," he said. "One—two—four—five—seven—nine in all!"

"Three are gone, then," cried Varley.

"Yes, lucky no more have perished under the circumstances," said Frank. "They must be ten miles away at least."

"Even more than that, I should say," remarked Bagstock.

"Well, it will be dark ere we can reach them, and I'll get their exact bearing by the compass so as not to miss them."

He made his way down into the carriage again, examined the compass and then increased the speed of the Electric Man.

When darkness settled down over the great plains, the electric light gleamed with the brightness of the noon-day sun.

On, on they went, till they knew that they must be in the near vicinity of the party.

Suddenly Pomp gave a whoop.

"Dar dey is!" he cried. "Dar dey is!"

Varley lifted up his voice and called out:

"We are coming, boys; here's water and food for you!"

Nine gaunt specters staggered to their feet to

stare at the Electric Man, which to them seemed like some horrible phantasmagoria taunting them with promises of food and water.

The carriage stopped, and Varley sprang out with a pail of water in his hand.

"Back here with that pail!" cried Frank, sternly.

Varley stepped back.

"Go and make those men lie down, and tell 'em to stay down till we give 'em leave to rise. They would upset that pail in their eagerness to get at it, and all would be lost."

Varley saw that what he said was true, and he obeyed without uttering a word.

He went to each man and told him that relief had come, but that he must lie down and not move till he was told to.

Of course they all obeyed, but they cried out incessantly:

"Water! Water! For the love of Heaven, water!"

Barney, Pomp and Varley then carried a pint of water to each man, which was drunk eagerly.

Then Frank and the professor gave each some food which they had decided was the best for them in their weak condition.

They ate like famished wolves and Frank had to stop and say to them:

"Men, we have water and food enough, but in your condition, unless you eat little and slow you will be in greater danger than if I brought you nothing at all. Just exercise a little self-control and you will soon be out of danger."

Then he gave them more food and they tried to obey him, but the pangs of hunger were so great that it was a hard thing to do.

They succeeded in eating their allowance, however, and then had another pint of water within the next hour.

All night long they waited on them and succeeded in pulling them through, but they were too weak to travel the next day.

"We shall have to wait here at least three days," said Frank to the professor, "before they are strong enough to march."

"And then you have to escort them to the nearest river before you can drop them."

"Yes, that's true. It wouldn't do to leave them here in the midst of this arid plain."

"No, of course not, but that will lose us an entire week."

"Yes, and make terrible inroads on our provisions. The truth is we shall have to kill about 300 quails and cook them up for our own use."

"True, or we might get out of provisions altogether."

"That would be as bad on us as it was on them, only we could go 300 or 400 miles in twenty-four hours, whilst they could not make the tenth part of that distance."

They made a camp there and proceeded to brace up the men with rations of brandy and water and food.

But Frank shook his head as he surveyed the party, for they were, with one or two exceptions, as villainous-looking a set of men as he had ever seen in all his travels.

He quickly formed his opinion of them and communicated with the professor.

"Yes," said Bagstock, "I noticed what a hard-looking set of men they are, and I don't know that we have done any good to the country by saving their lives. They are all thieves or murderous individuals, judging from appearances, though I am at a loss to know what induced them to come so far out into the interior."

"We must try to find that out."

Frank instructed Pomp and Barney to disarm them as they slept and place all their weapons in the carriage.

It was soon done, and then he instructed them to make sure that some one was in the carriage ere they left it.

"Under no circumstances must the carriage be left alone. One must remain inside all the time."

When the men awoke and found their weapons taken away from them they growled and demanded them back again.

"When you are well and strong and able to carry them you shall have them," said Frank.

They seemed to acquiesce very quietly, and said no more about it till on the third day, when they were told to march in a southeast direction.

Then they demanded their guns and revolvers.

CHAPTER XII.

LEFT TO THEIR FATE.

THE demand was made in a very peremptory tone by one of the men of the name of Crowther.

"What do you want a gun for?" Frank demanded.

"There is no game on this plain, nor are there any enemies you need fear. Why do you wish to carry a ten-pound gun on a long

day's march?"

"'Cause I feel safer with it in my hands," said the reply, "and as it's my own, I want to carry it."

"Well, don't you worry now," said Frank. "You can have your gun the moment an enemy shows up."

"But I want it now," said the man, very emphatically.

"But you can't have it now."

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"Because you are living now at my expense," was the reply. "Provisions are scarce, and the more weight you have to carry the more food you will require to keep up your strength."

"Give me my gun, and I won't require any more food than the rest of 'em will."

"Don't be a fool," said Varley. "You know very well the gentleman is right."

"Don't you be a fool, Varley," returned Crowther. "How do you know we are not already arrested and are about to be marched to prison?"

"Hello!" exclaimed every man in the party, looking hard at Varley and then at Frank.

Frank could not repress a smile at the absurdity of the idea.

That smile, however, they construed into the triumphant smile of a successful detective, and they at once began to sheer off, some picking up stones with which to protect themselves.

"What's the matter with you?" Frank asked. "I am not an officer. I am an American; only Professor Bagstock is an Australian. You are a set of fools."

"Give us our guns."

"If I do I shall leave you where you are."

"Give us our guns, and you may do as you please."

"Is that the wish of all?"

"Yes!" came from all of them in a voice.

"Very well, I'll move off about a quarter of a mile and leave your guns and ammunition on the ground. What I have done for you was prompted by the dictates of humanity. I do not care to put myself in the power of men whose past lives have been such as yours. Good-bye, now."

The Electric Man dashed away, and in a couple of minutes, when about a quarter of a mile off, stopped.

Barney and Pomp placed all their weapons on the ground, and then re-entered the carriage.

"Now we must go back for more water and game," said Frank. "Those ungrateful wretches have eaten our substance without so much as thanking us for what we did for them."

"Yes, and they would cut our throats if they could, and take the Electric Man for their own use."

"Of course they would. Well, let 'em take the consequences of their folly now," and they dashed off toward the last stream they had left, bending more toward the south than the way they had come.

As they looked back they saw the convicts running to possess themselves of their weapons.

"Dey am callin' us back, Marse Frank," said Pomp, who was watching them from the rear.

"Too late. We saved their lives, and now this is the gratitude they show us."

They were soon out of sight of the men, bearing southward at a rapid rate of speed.

When they had run about seventy-five or eighty miles they suddenly came in sight of timber.

"Why, we are nearer water than I dreamed of," said Frank.

"That stream must have made a bend toward the west," remarked the professor, "and I am glad of it."

"There am lots ob game ober dar," said Pomp, pointing in the direction of the timber, where fowls were seen flying in every direction.

"Yes; get your shot-guns, for we must kill, dress and cure fowl for the next two days, and pack them away for use."

In a half hour they reached the timber, through which flowed a stream of clear water, whilst the woods were full of game.

Barney and Pomp at once began to prepare the camp, and the other two went after game.

They soon struck a flock of pheasants, and the work began.

In the little time they had before the sun went down they had brought down at least half a hundred pheasants.

"That's enough for Barney and Pomp to cook to-night," said Frank. "Let's gather them in and see how many there are."

They soon had more than they could carry, so they piled them in a heap and made several trips to get them all into camp.

"There's no fish in this stream," said Frank, a little later, when he had tried his luck at fishing.

"Which I am glad to hear, as there will be no boomerangs about then," returned the professor.

"Yes, we are all right on that point. We can kill and cook at our leisure now."

The evening meal over, they all went to work—even the professor taking a hand at it—dressing the pheasants.

Barney and Pomp were good hands at broiling game, and ere they laid down that night the whole batch had been cooked to a turn and laid away to be used as wanted.

The next day they began the work over again, killing quail and pheasants, and by noon they had slain enough to feed them a whole month.

But it was a task to dress and cook them—Pomp deciding that it would take them all the next day to do so.

They went at it methodically, and the air was full of small flying feathers all the afternoon.

Night found them well satisfied with their day's work and sport, and when they rolled in their berths they slept like men who had earned the right to rest and sleep.

"I wonder where those ten men are now," said the professor when he awoke the next morning.

"I don't know," replied Frank, "but I'll wager that they haven't got such a breakfast as we have."

"Of course not. They would give up their weapons now for a pint of water or a pheasant."

"Yes. What a lot of fools they are. But then they had rather take the chances, I suppose, than go back to prison or into penal servitude. When I think about it I can't blame them as much as I did."

The day was spent in quiet hunting near the camp, whilst Pomp and Barney continued the cooking.

By night the quantity they needed had been prepared and packed down for future use.

"Now we'll take another start in the morning, after filling the water-tank," said Frank, as he lit a cigar and proceeded to enjoy a smoke.

They smoked for some time, and then prepared to go to bed.

As usual, they slept in the carriage, in their regular berths, to make sure that no harm would come to them during the night.

Just how long they had slept they did not know, but when they awoke, it was to find the carriage and Electric Man surrounded by ten desperate white men nearly crazed by hunger.

"We have you now!" cried Crowther and Varley, as they all leveled their rifles at the carriage. "Give us food, or you are dead men!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AWFUL FLIGHT OF THE CONVICTS.

WHEN the convicts saw the Electric Man rush southward and leave them there in that arid plain without food and water, they were so stunned that for some minutes they did not know what to do or say.

The man who had saved their lives when they had abandoned every hope had left them to battle for life again.

Again they were to die by inches—to feel the gnawing pangs of hunger and the burning thirst which had consumed them. The thought was horrible.

At last Varley spoke out.

"What fools we are!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—fools, idiots!" said another.

"Call 'em back!" cried a third.

"Stop! Come back!" they all yelled at the top of their voices, waving their arms above their heads.

But the Electric Man was leaving them at the rate of twenty miles an hour, and their calls were not heard.

Then they fell to abusing Reade.

"He is a government officer sent to arrest us," said one.

"Yes," said another, "and that's why he did not want to let us have our arms. I'd as soon die here as go back into bondage again."

"So would I," put in a third.

"Fools!" hissed Varley. "That man is an American gentleman. He is the best friend we ever had. Had he been an officer sent after us he would have handcuffed us when we were too weak to resist, and thus kept us in his power. He would not have fed us till we were strong again and then left us to our fate. If we die now we will have had our just deserts."

The convicts were silent.

Varley's reasoning had given them food for thought, but it was too late now to profit by it.

The Electric Man was now miles away, and hope began to die out with them.

"If you had said nothing about arms all would have been right," said Varley, turning to Convict Crowther.

"I wanted my arms," said Crowther, sullenly.

"Well, you have them. What are you going to do with them?"

"Protect myself," was the reply.

"Against what?"

"Fools like you."

Varley knocked him down.

There would have been a free fight then and there had not one man cried out:

"Come now, what's the use? Let's be quiet and save our strength to save our lives."

"Yes," said another, "that's what I say. Crowther, behave yourself now, or we'll put an end to you at once. But for you we would have been all right."

Crowther sprang to his feet and made a run for the arms, which Frank had deposited on the ground for them before leaving them to their fate.

Varley saw his object, and at once started in a race to reach the weapons at the same time.

Then the whole party of ten made a break, and it was a hard race for the distance of a quarter of a mile. Varley reached the pile of arms at the same time with Crowther.

But ere either one could use their weapon the others caught Crowther and threatened to end him then and there if he did not behave himself.

"I'll kill him!" hissed Crowther.

"Then we'll wipe you out, mind that!" said one of the party.

"Yes!" chorused the gang.

"Shake hands, Crowther," said Varley. "I bear you no malice," and he extended his hand to the convict.

"Shake, Crowther!" yelled the others, as Crowther hesitated.

Crowther took his hand and shook it, after which Varley said:

"Now we have got to fight for our lives again, and we can hope to pull through only by the closest shave. We must elect a leader and follow him faithfully—at least till we get to where there is game or water."

"Yes, that's so," said one. "I move we elect Varley. He saved us once. Maybe he can do it again."

Varley was chosen leader—even Crowther voting for him.

"Now," said Varley, "we must make our way out of this as fast as we can. We must follow the trail made by Reade and his Electric Man."

"Why?" some one asked.

"Because they have made for the most direct route to game and water. By following their trail we shall not go wandering aimlessly about, but make a straight line."

"Yes, that's so."

"Then come on—we must push right straight ahead. It depends upon our ability to walk a long distance without food or water," and he led the way on the trail, followed by the others.

The march was a terribly hot one.

The rays of the sun beat down upon them with a fierce intensity, and ere half the day had passed they began to complain of heat and thirst.

"Don't think about it," said Varley, "and you won't be half so tired or thirsty."

"How can one keep from thinking about water when he is burning up with thirst?" one asked.

"Well, I don't know exactly, unless he thinks of something else."

"Exactly," said one sarcastically. "Suppose you give us something to think about."

"Well, think of all the gold we are leaving behind us," replied Varley. "The richest quartz in the world, and set your brains to work devising some plan by which we can get back there and get rich. When we are all rich we can buy a passage on almost any vessel leaving an Australian port."

"Yes, that we can!" said one of the party.

"Or we can send one to buy a vessel and we can all sail away in our own ship with a cargo of gold," suggested Varley. "We can all be millionaires or lords in some other country when we get away. Just think of that and trudge along till we get to where there is plenty of water and game."

"Yes—the gold is ours—as nobody else knows of its existence but ourselves," remarked Crowther. "We can devise some way of getting back there and working it out, when we have time to devote to it."

Thus they talked and trudged along under the broiling hot sun, keeping in the track of the Electric Man, which was as plain as four wheels could make it.

The day waned and the night came on.

Under the starlight they managed to keep with the trail and pushed on many a mile, till at last they had to stop for rest and sleep.

They slept till sunrise and then resumed their tramp, keeping on the trail of the Electric Man all the time.

If they suffered from thirst the day before they endured agonies now.

They craved water till some were nearly crazed.

Varley spoke words of strong encouragement. He was brave even in the face of death.

Somehow he had never lost faith in the presentiment that he would some day return to England, prove his innocence, and enjoy the inheritance that was justly his.

"Courage, boys," he would say to them. "We are strong yet and good for many a mile. Water and game are just ahead of us. Reade and his friends have taken a short cut for it."

They strained their eyes all day long in the vain effort to catch a glimpse of the tree-tops which would indicate the presence of water.

But the boundless and plain greeted them in every direction.

Look which way they would, a dreary, hopeless waste stared them in the face.

In the afternoon of the second day one of the men went raving mad for a few minutes, so great was his hunger and thirst.

They caught and held him till he regained his senses, and they trudged on as before.

When night came on, Varley said:

"We can't stop to rest or sleep. I feel it in my bones that we shall find water before morning. I never was so sure of anything in my life."

Thus encouraged they pushed on, having just light enough from the stars to enable them to keep on the trail.

"Timber—timber!" gasped one of the men, as he ran into a small bush a few miles back from the river where Reade and his party were encamped.

"Water is not far off," said Varley. "Keep cool, boys. We'll soon have plenty of water."

They trudged along with new life, and the timber became heavier, and the vegetation more luxuriant, till at last one discovered the light of the camp-fire of Reade and his party.

They made a rush forward and dashed past the carriage to the water a few paces beyond it, where they threw themselves on the ground and drank their fill of water.

Then they sprang up and surrounded the carriage, yelling:

"Give us food! Give us food or die!"

CHAPTER XIV.

POMP AND PROFESSOR BAGSTOCK CAPTURED.

THE fierce demand of the convicts, and the noise they made, caused Frank and the others to spring up from their berths in the carriage and gaze out upon them, with weapons in their hands.

"Here they are again!" cried the professor, as he saw them standing menacingly around the carriage, whilst two of them held the Electric Man, as if to keep him from running away from them.

"Yes, we are here!" cried Crowther, "and we have arms. Give us food, or we'll make an end of you!"

"Fools, you can't hurt us!" returned Frank. "You have arms—kill game for yourselves. You shall have nothing from us!"

"Mr. Reade," said Varley, speaking for the first time, "when you left us out there on the plains, these men elected me to lead them to game and water. We followed your trail, knowing you would find the shortest cut to both. They obeyed very well till they saw the light of your camp-fire, then I could do nothing with them. They are starving. You saved our lives once, and we proved ungrateful. We were afraid you were an officer come to arrest us, but we do not believe you are now."

"I don't care what they believe," replied Frank. "They can't have anything from us. They have arms. Let 'em take care of themselves. Game is plentiful here."

"That's enough," cried Crowther. "Boys, they have plenty, and to spare. Seize the thing and turn it over. At 'em, quick!"

"Stop!" cried Varley. "I am your leader. Don't touch it!"

But they were rendered desperate by hunger. They sprang forward and grabbed the wheels of the carriage.

"Over with it!" cried Crowther.

Frank touched the knob that controlled the electric current, and the next instant a wild yell burst from those who had seized the wheels.

They began to squirm, leap in the air and make horrible grimaces, screeching as if in agony.

"In the name of God, what ails them?" the professor exclaimed.

"I am giving them an electric shock," replied Frank.

"Ah, let me have it, then," returned the professor.

"All caught but one," remarked Frank, as he saw that Varley had not taken hold.

Barney and Pomp enjoyed the situation hugely, as they took it all in, watching Crowther squirm and leap, trying in vain to get away.

When he thought they had enough, Frank released them, and they all dropped to the ground in a heap, too weak to stand.

"It was what they deserved, sir," said the man Varley, "but they are starving men."

"That may be, but they must take care of themselves henceforth. Day is breaking. Let them kill and eat. Game is plentiful here."

The men were too much used up to do anything. The electric shock had knocked them out entirely.

The stars faded away, and the sun rose, and they were still there, unable to do anything but groan.

"Let me get out and shoot some pheasants for them," suggested the professor. "Pomp and I can soon kill enough to give 'em a square breakfast."

Frank consented, and Pomp and the professor took shot-guns and went out, leaving Barney and Frank inside to prepare breakfast against their return. Varley went with them.

Soon the reports of their guns told them that game was being slaughtered right and left by the three men.

Crowther pulled himself together on hearing the shots, and said:

"That means something to eat, boys. Come on."

He staggered away through the bushes, followed by the others.

"Better wait here till they bring the game in," Frank called after them.

But they heeded him not.

They dashed away through the bushes and disappeared from view.

"I don't like this," said Frank. "That fellow Crowther is a hard case. If he gets to fooling with Pomp he'll be killed, and the others will then shoot down Pomp and the professor."

"Leave me after them," said Barney.

"No, they are too many for you. Let's wait and see what comes of it. It may be all right after all."

For upward of a half hour Frank heard the guns going repeatedly, and then they ceased very suddenly.

A smoke was seen ascending from a dense part of the timber.

"They have built a fire out there," said Frank.

"Why did they not come back and cook their game here?"

Suddenly Varley was seen running toward the carriage at the top of his speed, a half dozen others in pursuit of him.

"Open the door, for God's sake!" cried Varley, as he dashed up to the carriage.

"What's the matter?"

"They have captured your two men, and now want to kill me," he replied.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Frank, "I was afraid of that. Come in, and if you play us any tricks you are a goner."

"I am not going to play any tricks," he said.

"I am trying to save my own life as well as yours."

"Mine is in no danger," said Frank. "Tell me what has happened?"

"Crowther and the others got around the nigger and the other man and took their guns away from them and tried to take mine. But I got away and broke for you."

"Well, now somebody is going to get hurt," said Frank. "I'll not show them any mercy after this. What are they doing now?"

"Cooking and eating their game. They'll be here as soon as they have satisfied their hunger."

An hour later a voice called from the bushes:

"Say, Reade!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Will you join us?"

"What do you mean?"

"Join us with your Electric Man, help us get gold and get out of this country?"

"No!" was the reply.

"Why not?"

"Because I didn't come here to help such rascals as you."

"But we've got the nigger and white man, and if you don't join us we'll hang 'em."

"Threats don't have any effect on me," said Frank. "Send them back here unharmed, or I'll lay out the whole gang of you."

"Threats don't have no effect on us, neither."

"That's Crowther," said Varley. "I know his voice."

Barney got his Winchester ready.

"Don't fire till I say so, Barney," said Frank.

Barney held his gun ready for instant use, and Frank started the Electric Man up, turned and made in the direction of the new camp-fire in the woods.

The men saw him coming and ran back into

the bushes beyond which the Electric Man could not pass.

"They are out of our reach," said Frank, turning to Varley, whom he somewhat distrusted.

Suddenly a shot was fired, and a bullet struck the steel net-work of the carriage.

"Now let 'em have your lead, Barney," said Frank. "They have begun war—let 'em have all they want."

Barney was on the lookout for a chance. He soon saw one dodging from tree to tree, and he fired quickly.

A yell told that the man was hit.

"Give 'em another," said Frank.

But they moved back farther into the timber, where the Electric Man could not go, and kept a watch on the carriage.

Noon came and Frank was very much worried over the matter.

He would never think of leaving the professor and Pomp to such a fate as they would meet if he should go off without them.

Suddenly yells and shots were heard.

"Good Lord!" cried Varley. "The natives have attacked them!"

"Good! I hope they'll give 'em a dose of boomerang!" exclaimed Frank.

The woods resounded with yells, but after a ten minutes' fight the convicts scattered, and two of them, together with Pomp and the professor, were captured.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RESCUE AND RETREAT.

THE situation was a perilous one indeed. Professor Bagstock and Pomp were in the hands of the natives, and the Electric Man was utterly unable to pursue them through the timber. It would be worse than folly for Frank and Barney to leave the carriage for a single moment.

"Varley," said Frank, turning to the man who had come to take sides with him against the convicts, "what do the natives do with their prisoners?"

"Kill them unless they want to use them for some purpose," was the reply.

"How many do you think are in that band out there?"

"I have no idea—though they seldom go in large numbers. I think this is a hunting-party, and that you may be able to recapture your friends if they once get out of the timber with them."

"Can you make yourself understood by them?"

"Oh, yes, very easily."

"Then open negotiations with them, and let's see what is the situation in regard to the prisoners."

Varley placed his hands to his mouth so as to make a sort of trumpet and uttered the call used by white men in the bush in Australia:

"Co-ee! Co-ee—co-ee!"

"Why, you are calling the whites!" exclaimed Frank, suspiciously.

"Yes, sir. I do that to make the blacks believe it comes from one of us, and they'll all rush here to get me."

"Ah! Here they come!"

A band of some two score of blacks came rushing up through the timber and surrounded the carriage and Electric Man.

They glared at the iron man in great surprise, and jabbered among themselves as if in consultation as to what it was.

Professor Bagstock and Pomp were seen from the carriage, bound and under a strong guard. The former was very pale, and blood trickled down one side of his face from a wound on his head.

He gave an appealing look to Frank, but did not say anything.

But Pomp was not able to hold his peace.

He knew there was safety inside of that carriage, and he wanted to get there.

"Marse Frank!" he cried. "Why don't you's shoot dese heah niggers?"

One of the guard struck him a whack over the head with his boomerang, muttering something he could not understand.

That was more than Pomp could stand. He wheeled and butted the fellow in the stomach, and laid him out senseless on the ground.

At that a half dozen rushed at him to run him through with their spears.

"My God!" exclaimed Frank, "they will kill him, and his hands are tied! Let 'em have it, Barney!"

Barney and Frank opened fire with their repeating-rifles, and Varley snatched up another and did likewise.

So rapid was the fire from the carriage that the half dozen natives were down ere they could reach the two prisoners.

Quick as a flash Pomp availed himself of the opportunity to make a break for the carriage, trusting to good luck to reach it before the natives could stop him.

"Open dat door!" he yelled, as he dashed forward.

Three natives got in his way, but he butted them out like a railroad engine and reached the side of the carriage in a trice.

Barney opened the door and let him in.

"Cut my han's loose dar!" Pomp cried, as he sprang inside.

Varley cut the cord that bound him, and the next moment Pomp had a gun in his hands and was laying out the natives with relentless ferocity, when Frank exclaimed:

"Look out for the professor! Don't hit him!"

Poor Bagstock!

He was so dazed at finding himself a prisoner—first to the convicts and now to the blacks—that he had no time to grasp an opportunity like Pomp did.

He stood there like one rooted to the spot, and saw Pomp make a successful dash for liberty without making any attempt to follow him.

The escape of Pomp so enraged the natives that they all rushed up to and surrounded the carriage—every one of them grabbing hold of it with both hands, to make sure of having all four inside.

Frank promptly turned on the electric current and caught the whole batch of them, with but two exceptions.

They howled, squirmed and struggled frantically to get loose, but all in vain.

The other two, thinking it was a fight of some kind, wanted to have a hand in it too. They ran around everywhere to look for a place to take hold.

Not being able to find one, they grabbed hold of two of their comrades and were caught in the current that way, and they too began to howl.

What a pandemonium they raised! Unable to get loose, they did nothing but yell.

"Hi, dar, pefessor!" yelled Pomp, "dey is all hitched on! Come in heah quick afore dey git loose!"

Barney lost no time in rescuing the professor. To spring out and rush to his side was the work of a moment. He cut him loose, and then said:

"Run ter the kerridge!"

Bagstock made a dash, and in another minute was in the carriage again.

Barney picked up two boomerangs and leisurely made his way back to the carriage with them.

Frank then shut off the current of electricity, and the blacks dropped to the ground in a heap, more dead than alive.

The wretches pulled themselves together slowly, and as fast as they did so pulled away from the Electric Man and carriage.

"Are you hurt, professor?" Frank asked.

"Yes, but not much," he replied. "I got a blow on the head which nearly laid me on the ground."

"Who gave it to you—the convicts or the natives?"

"The natives. The convicts only wanted to hold us as prisoners to bring you to terms. But they had a hard time handling Pomp. He was disarmed, but he butted them right and left till I thought they would have to kill him."

"How came you to let them get your gun, eh?" Frank asked of Pomp.

"Four ob dem jumped on me afore I knowed it, Marse Frank," was the reply, "but I made dem sick afore dey got me."

"Are you hurt?"

"Yes, sah. I is knocked all ober," he answered, feeling all over himself as if to make sure that he had no limbs broken.

The natives who had not been hit by bullets crawled away into the bushes and met under the trees for consultation. The shocks they had received from the battery of the Electric Man had broken them all up, and they didn't know what to make of it.

But in a little while a boomerang came whizzing through the air and struck the Electric Man on the shoulder with a force that would have felled an ox.

"We must get away from here," returned Frank, and he touched up the Electric Man and started him off down the stream, keeping a close watch out for any of the convicts.

Ere they had gone two miles they heard a man's voice in the timber call out:

"Hold on, Mr. Reade."

Frank stopped the carriage.

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I want to surrender to you, and thus get away from Crowther and his crowd."

"But I don't want you; you can stay with Crowther and his men."

"But I'll be the best man you could have along, and—"

"I know his voice," said Varley to Frank. "He is one of the worst in the crowd."

"Varley says you are as bad as Crowther. So we don't want you," returned Frank.

"Varley! Is he with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's the worst in the lot. Look out for him."

"I don't think you had any very good men in the crowd," said Frank. "I guess the boomerangs will take care of the lot of you."

The Electric Man started off again and pushed down the river a distance of a dozen miles or so, and stopped there to take in a supply of fresh water.

That done they went some ten miles further and stopped to camp for the night at a spot where they would leave the river the next morning to resume their trip back to the mountains near where they had found the starving convicts.

They ate supper, smoked their pipes and went to bed at the regular hour, leaving Barney and Pomp to divide the watch between them. At two o'clock Pomp took the watch, and when he had been on guard a couple of hours Varley sprang up and whispered to him:

"Tell Mr. Reade to wake up quick. He is in danger."

CHAPTER XVI.

OVERTURNED.

Pomp's hearing was very acute, and Varley's whispered warning at the quiet hour of the night was not lost upon him.

He heard a movement in the bushes as well as Varley, but did not know the meaning of it.

Without stopping to ask any questions he turned to Frank and shook him by the shoulder.

Frank instantly awoke and, without uttering a word, raised himself on his elbow.

"Dar's gwine ter be trouble heah," Pomp whispered to him.

That was enough.

He was on his feet in an instant, listening with the alertness of a cat watching a mouse.

Back in the bushes on three sides of the carriage could be heard sounds that came from either men or beasts creeping as if preparing to surround and spring upon it.

Frank turned to Varley and asked:

"What is it?"

"Boomerangs," was the whispered reply.

"How many, do you think?"

"Hundreds, maybe."

"Then we had better run for it. It's easier to run than to stand and fight so many."

He touched the knob that controlled the electric current between the battery and the electric man, and the man of steel started forward at a quick step.

Ere he had gone fifty yards a series of wild yells burst from the bushes all round them, and a shower of boomerangs rained upon the Electric Man and carriage.

"Good heavens!" gasped the professor, as he sprang out of his berth, suddenly awakened by the noise, "we are attacked again!"

"Howly nither o' Moses!" exclaimed Barney, springing out of bed and seizing his rifle, "the naggurs will be after catchin' us!"

The boomerangs rattled on the Electric Man and carriage like hail on a roof, and in a moment the whole thing came to a dead halt.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank, "there is something wrong. The man can't run any more."

"Heavens!" gasped Professor Bagstock, "then we are lost!"

"I don't know about that," returned Frank. "Something has happened to the machinery."

"What can it be?"

"That is more than I can say."

The whole place seemed to be alive with natives. They ran all around the carriage, hurling spears and boomerangs against it with terrific rapidity.

"This won't do," said Frank. "We've got to fight for our lives or they'll batter everything to pieces. A mountain of steel would have to yield to such pounding as this in the course of time."

He turned on the light, and the blinding glare so astonished the natives for a time that they ceased to throw spears or boomerangs. Their black forms were seen all around, and they glared fiercely at the electric light.

But they did not give way an inch.

On the contrary, they presented a bold front, seeming to rely on their numerical strength to capture the strange invader of their domain.

"Varley," said Frank, turning to the man

whom he had so strangely befriended, "can you make them understand you?"

"Yes, sir, I think I can."

"Well, ask them what they want of us."

Varley called to them in a jargon that was simply horrible to hear.

A big black chief responded, stepping boldly up to the side of the carriage to do so.

A talk ensued, in which the native chief demanded the unconditional surrender of the whites and their "man-wagon."

"Tell him we won't do anything of the kind," said Frank, "and that if he does not immediately retire we will open fire on him and his followers."

Varley repeated Frank's words, and the chief responded with a yell and an attempt to thrust his spear between or through the steel net-work of the carriage.

That was a signal for the others to do likewise, and in another moment a mass of some two or three hundred natives were surging around the carriage brandishing or hurling their spears.

"We are in a bad fix," said Frank. "Our only safety is in beating them off, and that we can do only with powder and lead. Give 'em the revolver."

All five opened fire with revolvers, and fired as rapidly as they could till the weapons were all discharged.

The yells of the natives were terrific.

Those near the carriage were pushed forward by those behind them, and hence could not get away from the death-dealing revolvers except by dodging underneath the vehicle.

That they did, and in another minute there were so many under it that there was imminent danger of the whole thing being turned over.

"Dey is gwine ter turn us ober, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, as he felt the carriage rise a few inches from the ground.

"I'll see if I can't give 'em a shock," said Frank, touching another knob.

The effect was electrical.

The natives underneath the carriage sprang up with such energy and terrified ferocity that the carriage was turned over on its side—the Electric Man tumbling with it on his left side.

"Good heavens!" gasped the professor, as all five of them rolled in a heap together. "We are lost!"

"Give 'em more lead!" cried Frank, quickly removing the cartridge shells from his revolver and inserting new ones.

The others promptly followed his example, and the fusillade was kept up all round, except on the bottom side of the carriage.

Ere the second round had emptied the revolvers the natives, seeing so many of their number down, and so many wounded, gave way and fell back under the protection of the gloomy shadows of the forest.

"This is terribly hot work," said Frank.

"Yes, sir," assented Bagstock. "I don't see how we can avoid a surrender."

"Surrender!" exclaimed Frank. "When they get this thing in their hands it will be when I am not able to pull a trigger."

"I was thinking, sir, that if we could make terms with them we might be able to get the Electric Man on his feet again, and make a dash for liberty."

"I won't trust them. The truth is I am afraid that they intend to destroy us—the old man included. We have plenty of ammunition, and may as well use it on these rascals as any other way."

"Mr. Reade," said the professor, "we are as good as captured now."

"Not by a jugful, professor," replied Reade, promptly.

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp. "Dem niggers ain't got us yet."

"No, bedad," added Barney, confidently. "We kin lick the crowd aw thim."

"Oh, well, you know more about such things than I do, but I don't see who is going to stand the Electric Man on his feet again."

"Did you know that the chief is killed, sir?" Varley asked.

"No! Is he?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"I gave him a bullet in his breast and saw him stagger away. I can tell now by the noise his followers make that he is dead."

"Well, what will they do now?"

"They will choose another chief."

"How?"

"I don't know. I have never seen them choose one, and can't say how they go about it."

"Marse Frank! Marse Frank!" cried Pomp in sudden alarm.

"What's the matter, Pomp?"

"De water is done run all outen de tank!"

"Good Lord!" gasped Bagstock, "and I was just wishing for a drink. We are undone now."

"Don't give up, professor," said Frank, "I have been in as tight a place as this and got out all right."

"But I don't see how we are going to get out of this," said Bagstock, who was now pretty well demoralized.

"Well, leave that to me, professor. Don't say anything to discourage the others, but hold yourself in readiness to obey orders promptly. Our safety is in that alone."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

The natives remained under the cover of the timber till daylight, which was not very far off, and then began to throw boomerangs again.

With the coming of daylight Frank could see a number of them dodging about in the bushes. He opened fire on them.

So many were hit that the others retired out of range till not one of them was seen from the carriage.

CHAPTER XVII.

BARNEY'S CAPTURE AND ESCAPE.

"Now whatever we do we must do quickly," said Frank to the others. "They are out there in the woods still, waiting to get another chance at us, or make a choice of another chief. We are in a bad fix, being without water as we are. If we have to take the old man to pieces to see what is wrong about the machinery, we may have to stay here two or three days. Even then, if we have to keep the natives at bay while doing the work, we may fail for want of water. There are times when water is worth to men all the gold in the world."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp.

"You are right about that, Mr. Reade," assented the professor; "and, that being the case, how are we going to live three or four days without water?"

"There's the river out there—only a little ways," suggested Frank.

"Yes, and a couple of hundred savages between it and us."

"Bate ther hids off av thim," said Barney, whose pluck generally increased with danger.

"How about our heads?" the professor asked.

"That is not the question just now," remarked Frank. "We want to put the carriage on its wheels and the Electric Man on his feet. It is easy enough to stand the carriage up all right in just a minute or two, but it is very different with the old man. He is heavy—very heavy—heavier than all five of us. I am afraid something is broken about him. All of you take your rifles and stand ready to fire if any of them come into view while I am out there."

"Are you going out there?" Bagstock asked.

"Yes, of course."

Frank managed to open the door and get out whilst the others stood ready with their rifles to defend him if attacked.

He went out to the prostrate Electric Man, and made a hasty examination.

"The under shaft is broken," he said, "and one of the electric wires is disconnected. That's why he stopped and wouldn't go any further."

Taking a screw-driver from his pocket, he promptly detached the other shaft from the Electric Man.

Half a dozen natives saw him and tried to get near enough to throw boomerangs at him. But bullets from the Winchesters in the carriage laid some of them low, and warned the others away.

"Now run out—all of you," called Frank, "and help me turn the carriage up again."

They obeyed, and laid hold of the carriage with an energy that stood it on its wheels in a jiffy.

But a wild yell from the natives caused them to scamper back into the carriage, and a hot fire from the rifles followed so quickly that the blacks were severely punished ere they could get under cover again.

"We are this much better off than ten minutes ago," remarked Frank. "What we want now is to get the old man on his feet again."

"Can't we lift him up as we did the carriage?" Professor Bagstock asked.

"We might, and then again we might not," said Frank. "But that shaft will have to be mended before we can hitch him between them again. Let me see if I can't find a piece of iron or steel which will do for a brace on that broken shaft."

He opened the tool-chest and took out a small vise and a patent brace for boring holes through steel or iron. Then he found two pieces of steel of the thickness of boiler iron. Those he put together in the vise—which he fastened to the tool-chest—and proceeded to bore holes through them. It was done inside of a half hour, and then he went out, taking the vise and brace with

him, leaving the others to keep the natives at bay while he was at work.

It took him longer to bore holes through the shaft, as it was much thicker than the two pieces he was to use as braces. But it was done after two hours of hard work, during which time the rifles kept the blacks at bay.

Screws and caps soon made the broken shaft as strong as any other part.

"That is all right now," said Frank, when the work was done, "but the worst is to come yet. We must get the old man on his feet and put him between the shafts."

But night had now come on, and darkness afforded such good protection to the natives that Frank dared not undertake to do any more till daylight came again.

By this time they were all so thirsty that Frank had to open a bottle of wine to quench their thirst with.

"I se'er gwine ter hab some ob dat water in dat ribber," said Pomp, when they had finished eating supper in the carriage.

"I'm with yez," said Barney.

"Better be careful," remarked Frank. "They may be all around us yet."

"We kin crawl down dar froo de bushes," said Pomp, and so they each took a pail and started out under cover of darkness.

Frank and the others waited and listened for over ten minutes, and then a terrible row began.

"There!" exclaimed Frank. "They are in for it!"

Barney and Pomp were heard fighting against odds, but those in the carriage dared not leave it in the dark.

Suddenly they heard Pomp's voice as he called to them to open the door. Frank opened it and Pomp sprang inside.

"I didn't git no water," he said.

"Where is Barney?" Frank asked.

"Out dar somewhar. Dem niggers is thicker'n dirt in dem bushes. I buttet 'em outen de way an' run for it."

"Poor Barney!" sighed Frank. "I fear it is all up with him. I can never go back home without him."

"Marse Frank," said Pomp, "dat Irisher was born lucky. He ain't er gwine ter go under wid dem niggers."

Frank was worried very much, and called several times to Barney after the noise had subsided.

"They have captured him and gone down the river with him," said Varley, who seemed to understand the meaning of several sounds that came from the woods.

"Then we can do nothing till we get the old man on his feet again. Oh, for daylight, so that I could get to work at it! Poor Barney!"

There was very little sleep in the carriage, for all were troubled over the fate of Barney. The night seemed to be interminable, but day finally dawned, and Frank went to work on the prostrate Electric Man whilst Pomp and Varley prepared breakfast.

Varley was so sure that the natives had gone that he did not hesitate to take a pail and go to the river for water.

He came with the water, not a native being in sight, and the others drank eagerly of it—being the first drink they had had in at least thirty-six hours.

Then Frank again attacked the Electric Man, taking him to pieces and building him up from his feet.

With Pomp's help he managed to finish the task by the middle of the afternoon. Then he connected the electric wire again and attached him to the shafts.

To his great joy he found that everything worked all right again, and that the old man was eager to run.

"Now let's get to the water, fill the tank and see if we can't get on Barney's trail."

They veered around and got to the edge of the water, where the hose was thrown out and the little pump set going. In a few minutes the tank was full of clear sweet water.

"Now let's get on the trail of that band of natives," said Frank, as he started off again.

"Get in the edge of the timber," said Varley. "They get out into the clearing when they wish to make good time."

Frank obeyed, and then hurried up the Electric Man, tearing through the small scrub bushes at a rattling pace.

They made nearly twenty miles, and then had to strike—a little before sunset—across a piece of treeless plain of several miles, toward a piece of timber, from which could be seen a small, thin column of smoke ascending.

"They must be there," said Varley. "That is about the distance they would make since last night."

The Electric Man made good time across the

plain, and was yet a mile away from the timber, when Pomp sung out:

"Dar's Barney! Look dar!"

They looked, and saw a man running at full speed toward them, with a body of natives pursuing him, the air full of flying boomerangs.

"Dat's Barney! Dat's the Irisher!" cried Pomp, snatching up a rifle to be ready to defend him the moment his pursuers came in range.

Frank urged up the Electric Man, and in a few minutes had caught up with Barney, who was out of breath and ready to fall from sheer exhaustion.

Stopping and opening the door of the carriage, Frank seized him by the collar and pulled him inside.

"Thank God you are back again!" said Frank.

The reports of the rifles as the others fired on the natives drowned Barney's reply. The natives, seeing that he had gotten away, hastily retreated.

That night Barney told the story of his capture and adventures, an experience he would never forget as long as he lived.

The next morning they turned toward the mountains and traveled hard all day, coming in sight of them by sunset.

Yet they pushed on, anxious to get there as soon as they could.

Rocks became numerous now, and the surface somewhat uneven, yet they kept on steadily in their course.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD.

NIGHT came on and the stars came out in all their glory.

A death-like stillness reigned over the vast plain, and nothing save the steady tramp of the Electric Man was heard.

The electric lights made the way they were going as bright as day, yet Frank had to keep a sharp lookout for stones, which now began to appear occasionally.

To strike one and break a wheel, or any part of the intricate machinery in the Electric Man while in that arid plain, would be the death knell of the entire party.

Frank had resolved to push on until midnight, unless he reached the mountain sooner, and so they did not stop for supper, but ate a cold lunch on the way.

It was evident, however, that they would reach the mountains before midnight, as the great boulders they passed told that the mountains of stone were not far off.

The stones became so numerous at last that they were compelled to stop and go into camp.

Varley insisted that nothing having vegetable or animal life existed about the mountains, and that no danger could result from sleeping on the ground in the open air.

"I'll stay in the carriage till I see for myself," said Frank, shaking his head. "I don't care to take any chances in a strange place."

"You will let me sleep out-doors?" Varley asked.

"Yes, if you wish to."

"Oh, I am used to it now, and it makes little difference with me where I sleep if I have plenty to eat."

He stretched himself out at full length on the ground and was soon soundly sleeping.

They all slept well, for the air was dry and pure, and when they awoke in the morning they felt greatly refreshed.

The huge mountains of stone loomed up against the sky in formidable proportions, and our adventurous travelers gazed at them in silent awe for some time.

"Dere ain't no wood heah for er fire, Barney," said Pomp as he looked around at the dreary waste of stone and sand.

"Troth, and yez are roight, Pomp," replied Barney, as he gazed around at the scene. "It's ther Ould Nick's own home, it is."

"Use the oil stove for making coffee, Pomp," said Frank.

"Yes, sah," and the faithful ducky took from another chest a small oil stove and a gallon can of oil.

In a few minutes he had the stove on a stone and a kettle of water on top of it.

Barney brought out the hard tack and broiled fowls whilst Pomp devoted himself to the making of a pot of good coffee.

When the coffee was made they partook of a hearty meal, standing round a boulder which answered the purpose of a table.

Suddenly Professor Bagstock dropped the piece of quail he was eating and leaned over on the rock gazing at it as if he were looking for something.

"It is gold, Reade!" he excitedly exclaimed. "Pure gold and plenty of it! Just look there!"

He pointed to a streak of yellowish metal running along the broken surface of the rock, which could be plainly seen by the naked eye.

"Be me soul!" exclaimed Barney, as he gazed at it, "I'd rather have it in me pocket than say it in the shtone."

"Dat's er fac!" said Pomp, running his hand over the yellowish streak. "Dis heah stone am got er hard grip on it, suah."

The professor was too much excited to finish his breakfast.

He followed the streak of gold round and over the rock till it was lost against the ground.

"There's no telling how much that vein would pan out," he said.

"Oh, de Lor' gorrarnighty!" yelled Pomp with a vigor that caused every one to think a snake had struck him.

They sprang away from the rock and looked at him.

He was tugging at a nugget of gold as large as his thumb, which projected several inches from a crevice in the rock near where he was standing.

"Good heavens!" gasped the professor. "Just look at that! Hold on, Pomp."

"I'se holdin' on, sah," replied Pomp, grasping the nugget as if afraid it would get away from him.

"Take an ax and see if you can't break off the piece of stone that holds it," suggested the professor.

"Yes, sah," and he ran for one of the axes in the tool-chest of the carriage.

Frank examined the piece of gold, and decided that it would be a hard job to get the whole lump out without proper implements for crushing the rock.

But Pomp gave the stone a few tremendous blows with the ax a few inches above and below the nugget with such effect that it split, and the nugget dropped to the ground.

"Whoop!" yelled Pomp, dropping the ax and seizing the nugget. "Dis 'ere am luck for a nigger, suah."

The professor took the nugget and examined it.

"It is pure gold," he said, "and the lump will weigh eight or ten pounds at the least."

"That is the largest lump of pure gold I ever saw," said Reade as he held it in his hand.

"It is worth over two thousand dollars," said the professor.

"Oh, golly!" cried Pomp, leaping up and striking his heels together, "dis am luck, an' no mistake."

They all had to handle it, and Varley's eyes gittered as he beheld the little lump of yellow metal that fixed the standard of values in the entire commercial world.

"That would enable me to escape to America," he said, loud enough for all to hear him.

"Maybe you may find even a larger lump," said Frank. "Who knows?"

"I can hardly hope to be so lucky," he replied, shaking his head.

"Why, I think you are an extremely lucky man," said Frank. "Just see how you have twice been saved from death in the last week."

"But look at the twenty years of my unlucky life."

"Your luck is turning. You'll come out all right yet."

"I hope so, but twenty years of hard luck makes me doubt it."

They finished the meal and then went prospecting among the rocks till they were a quarter of a mile away from the Electric Man.

Suddenly Frank bethought himself, and exclaimed:

"Good heavens, what idiots we are!"

"What's the matter now?" the professor asked.

"We have left the carriage all alone a quarter of a mile away—a most idiotic thing to do!" and the great inventor took to his heels and ran all the way to the Electric Man.

"I'll never leave it unguarded again under any circumstances," he said to himself as he sat down inside the carriage.

He recovered his breath from the long run and then moved along among the rocks till he was almost up with the others.

"What luck?" he called to the professor, as he saw him examining a large fragment of rock.

"Plenty of quartz, but no more nuggets," was the reply.

"Is it rich?"

"The richest I ever saw."

"Is it extensive?"

"It's everywhere!" replied the professor. "I never saw anything like it."

"Oh—Ugh—Oh, Lord!" yelled Pomp, a little distance away, dashing toward the carriage at the top of his speed. "Lord sabe me! Oh, de

good Lor'!" and he fell almost in a faint at the door of the carriage.

CHAPTER XIX.

POMP'S TERROR AND REMARKABLE DISCOVERY.

THE evident panic which had suddenly seized upon Pomp created no little excitement among the others who heard him.

Barney and Varley were near together at the time, and the professor about fifty yards beyond them.

The moment they heard Pomp yell and saw him running with all his speed toward the Electric Man, they sprang away too, and ran like deer, without knowing what they were running from.

"What is it?" demanded the professor, running up, and out of breath.

"Hanged if I know," said Frank. "What is it, Pomp?"

"Oh, Lor' sabe us!" groaned Pomp, still in a sort of panicky condition. "Oh, de Lor' sabe us! Ugh!"

And he shuddered as if shaken by a chill.

"Well, what the deuce is the matter with you?" demanded Frank.

"Faith, an' it's a scared nagur he is," said Barney.

"Go dar an' look at 'dat!" cried Pomp, pointing in the direction of the bowlder from which he had just fled.

Barney looked at the bowlder and wondered what in creation it could be which had given him such a scare, as he knew Pomp was fully as brave as he was.

"Look here, Pomp," said Frank, "when are you going to tell us what you are kicking up such a rumpus about?"

"Afore de Lor', Marse Frank, I'se scared 'most ter def—oh, Lor'! Ugh!"

"Do you want something to brace up on?"

"Yes, sah—I'se all broke up."

Frank stepped back into the carriage and brought out a gill of brandy and gave it to him.

Pomp swallowed it at a gulp, and Barney exclaimed:

"Bedad, it's mesilf as will be afther getting scared every day for a brace loike that."

"Go ober dar an' look, Barney," said Pomp. Still Barney didn't care to go till he knew what it was which had given the old man such a shaking up.

"Well, will it take another drink to bring you round?" Frank asked.

"No, sah, I'se all right now, Marse Frank," said Pomp.

"Well, let us know what ails you, then."

"I was ober dar lookin' 'bout dem dere big rocks when I looked round dat big un ober dar, an' dar sat er lot er men on de ground, stone dead an' leanin' up ergin de rock."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, sah."

"Go and see about it, Barney."

"Phwat, sorr!"

"Go and see about that."

"Bedad, thin, I'll take ther brace afore I goes."

Varley burst out laughing and said:

"A dead man can't hurt anybody. Come on—I'll go with you," and he led the way toward the rock from which Pomp had fled so precipitately.

There he found seven white men seated down by the bowlder and leaning against it—all showing that they had died of starvation.

He looked at them calmly and said to himself: "My fate came near being like this," and then he turned and made his way back to the carriage, where he said:

"There are seven dead men there, sir."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

"How long have they been dead?"

"I don't know, sir, but a long time, I guess, as they seemed to be parched or dried up."

"Well, let's go and take a look at them, professor," said Frank, leading the way. "You stay here in the carriage, Pomp."

"Yes, sir—dis chile doan want ter see dem no more."

They went back with Varley and found that the men were evidently miners from their dress and the tools found lying around.

"They came here to solve the problem of the traditions among the natives," said Frank, "and perished for want of food and drink."

"Just as we would have perished but for you, Mr. Reade," said Varley.

"Yes—no doubt of it. I wonder how long they have been here?"

They made an examination of the clothes of one man, and found bits of paper in one pocket which were dated back nearly twenty years.

"They have been here somewhere between fifteen or twenty years," said Frank.

Varley saw a nugget of gold in the hand of

one of the dead men, and took hold of it to pull it away.

The hand broke off at the wrist.

"It will weigh a pound, at least," he said as he held it up.

Then, as if seized by a sudden impulse, he felt of the clothes of the seven dead men, and found small nuggets in the pockets of each one, also revolvers, which had rusted and were useless.

"Why, you have as much gold as Pomp's nugget is worth," said the professor as he looked at the pieces Varley had collected from the dead.

"Yes, sir. Am I entitled to it?"

"Every ounce of it," said Frank. "You have as much show here as any of the rest of us."

"Thank you, Mr. Reade," said Varley, and his bronzed face turned a shade paler as he spoke. "Will you take care of it for me?"

"Yes. You can put it in one of the chests and it will be safe there."

Varley gathered up the nuggets and he started toward the carriage with them.

"Pomp," he said, as he came to the door of the carriage with the nuggets, "I am your friend for life."

"What's de matter, Mister Varley?"

"Do you see these?"

Pomp's eyes opened wide as saucers as he glared at the yellow lumps of gold.

"Yes, I see dem!" he said.

"Well, I got them on those dead men."

Pomp sprang back to the farther end of the carriage.

"Go way dar, I tole yer," he cried.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Go way dar, I tole yer!" cried Pomp again, drawing a revolver.

"What in blazes is the matter with you, Pomp?" exclaimed Varley, completely dumfounded at the conduct of the faithful black.

"Youse done gone an' robbed de dead!" said Pomp, who was full of the superstitions of his race. "Go way, white man—youse er bad un!"

"What's the matter now?" Frank asked, coming up just as Varley was turning away.

"Pomp won't let me get into the carriage—says I'm a bad man because I robbed de dead."

"The deuce!"

The professor laughed in spite of himself, and Frank turned to Pomp and said:

"Let Varley put his gold in the chest, you old fool."

"Marse Frank—he done gone and robbed de dead!"

"I saw him take the gold—it was lying there by those dead men who will never want it again. It was not robbing the dead."

Pomp came out of the carriage and let Varley go in, where he tied up his nuggets in a dirty handkerchief which Barney gave him.

It took Pomp the rest of the day to get over his scare, and he did not go out any more till they had moved several miles away from the spot where the seven dead men were found.

When they stopped to make a camp for the night there was not a piece of wood out of which to make a fire.

They made coffee on the oil-stove, and ate the broiled quail, of which they had an ample supply.

Feeling very tired, they retired to their blankets at an early hour and slept till sunrise.

They were oppressed by the profound silence that reigned around them, as not even the hum of an insect could be heard—the silence of the tomb reigned everywhere.

After breakfast they again hunted among the fragments of rock for signs of gold.

They found it everywhere, and the professor declared that he had never seen such rich quartz in all his life.

CHAPTER XX.

NUGGETS OF GOLD.

ON the second day after their arrival at the mountain Frank said to Bagstock:

"There is no doubt about the gold, professor, but the passage over the mountain is still a question."

"Yes—and it looks as if it would remain a question, for I don't see how such a vehicle can get over that mountain. It is nothing but a pile of broken, jagged rocks from the base to the summit."

"We have got to hunt for a passage, that's all," said Frank.

"Yes, that's all we can do. We can't cut a passage, you know."

"No—certainly not."

They entered the carriage again, rode along the mountain's base for many miles, looking for a place that would give them a faint hope of a chance to cross over to the other side.

At last they came to a spot where there was quite a depression in the mountain, and the face of the immense chain of rock seemed quite smooth.

"Let's look at this place," said Frank. "We may be able to find a passage up there."

They stopped, and Frank, Varley and the professor set out to make the search for a passage, leaving Barney and Pomp in charge of the carriage.

It was at least a mile to the base of the mountain—or rather where the actual rise commenced—and to reach it they had to pick their way through an immense field of broken stone.

"I never saw such indisputable evidences of a violent upheaval of stone in all my life," said Frank, as he trudged along over the broken rocks.

"Nor I either," added the professor.

"It does not appear at all like a volcanic eruption," remarked the young inventor.

"No, and that is what troubles me. No lava, nor ashes, nor anything of a volcanic nature."

"Well, well do you think of it?"

"I don't know what to think of it. It looks to me as if nature had thrown these stones here as a barrier to any further advances in this direction."

"Just what I was thinking, and I wondered what was beyond these mountains that Nature could wish to keep the world from seeing."

"That is a hard question to answer. It is said to be a sandy, treeless plain which no mortal ever crossed. Here, come this way. This seems to be a sort of passage for a little distance."

Frank went over to the professor's side and joined him in the ascent, which at that point seemed to be quite easy.

"The line of broken rock seems to end here," remarked Frank, looking around him.

"Yes," returned the professor, "and it begins again over there," pointing to the right.

Frank gazed about him as if puzzled over the strange formation of the surface. As for the professor, he seemed to lose interest in everything but the aspect presented by nature as displayed all around him.

"This is something that will interest the geographical societies of the world," he remarked. "These fragments of stone show that they have been rended by violent forces, and yet I see no evidences of fire about them. They are very hard, and running from gray to very dark in color. It is a study for the scientist, and—"

"Excuse me, professor," said Frank, interrupting him. "Let's find a passage over the mountain first, and then study the scientific features afterward."

"Oh, yes—go on. I can survey as I go along," replied the learned man, as he followed the young inventor up the mountain side.

Frank had followed a sort of clearing, which seemed to extend all the way up as far as they could see, and which promised a passage for the Electric Man and carriage.

"Not a sprig of grass nor even a bunch of moss among the stones," remarked the professor, as he passed on up the mountain. "I never heard of a region more devoid of vegetable or animal life. Yet there is gold running all through this mountain. It seems to me that we ought to call these the 'Quartz Mountains.'"

"I never dreamed that such a spot existed anywhere in the world," said Frank, as he looked around him. "This is the largest rock in the world, I guess."

"No doubt of that," said Bagstock. "I shall make a note of this in my report. It is rock—rock everywhere, and quartz at that."

"Yes. That will set the world on fire, and thousand of lives will be lost in efforts to get at the gold."

"Yes, yes, that's so. Give me a drink of water, please. This climbing up hill makes one very thirsty."

"So it does. What a lucky thing it is that we have water, as I see no signs of any in this region of sand and stone."

The professor drank from the flask which Frank handed to him, and then returned it.

Up, up the mountain they climbed, winding here and there around huge boulders in quest of a passage for the Electric Man.

It seemed that, with a loose stone moved here and there as they ascended, an easy passage could be made.

How it would be on the other side they did not know. But they resolved to go on up to the top and see what they would have to face.

They ascended to the summit, which Frank estimated to be about 2,000 feet above the base where the Electric Man, in charge of Barney and Pomp, had been left.

But there was a surprise for them at the summit which they did not dream of.

Instead of a rugged summit of gray and dark

rock they beheld an immense plateau of desert sand, stretching away for miles to the right, left and front.

Straight across—miles away—they could see the other edge of the plateau outlined against the clear sky.

"Well, well," exclaimed the professor, as he stood there and gazed at the strange phenomenon—for such he could not help regarding it—"a sandy desert on top of a high mountain is something I never heard of before in all my life. We have made a discovery, Mr. Reade, which will hand our names down to the ages with that of Christopher Columbus. How did this sand get up here?" and he stopped and picked up a handful of the sand and examined it.

Frank was so astonished at what he saw that he did not pay much attention to what was being said by the professor. He was gazing across the plateau and wondering what sort of country lay beyond it.

"It is the same sand which we came across in reaching these mountains," remarked Bagstock, more to himself than to any one else.

"Eh—what's that, professor?" Frank asked, turning and facing the learned man.

"I say that this is the same kind of sand we found on the plains," repeated Bagstock. "I guess wind storms, whirlwinds, etc., for ages have blown clouds of sand over this basin and filled it."

Frank now became interested.

"Why did we not find any on the sides as we came up?" he asked.

"Oh, the rains may have washed it all away, while this plateau held it where it fell."

"Yes—yes—that must be the solution of the mystery," assented the young inventor. "Yet it is a strange, very strange thing."

"Stranger than fiction. The world will be slow to believe it. I am repaid in this hour for all I have endured on this trip so far."

"Yes, it is an important discovery, and, as you say, the world will be slow to believe it. This sand is 2,000 feet above the base of the mountain. When the rainy season comes the water must find a vent somewhere. Where does it go? There must be an immense reservoir somewhere below."

"Yes, undoubtedly. We may find it yet, and thus solve the problem of life in this unknown region."

"I hope so. I would like to go across to the other side of this plateau and gaze over at the country beyond, but we have not time now. We must descend to the carriage, or night will overtake us and stop us, and Barney and Pomp will be very uneasy about us."

"Then we had better start at once," said Bagstock. "To-morrow we can come up in the carriage and look about more leisurely."

They turned, and began the descent, which was much easier than going up.

Away off below them they could see the Electric Man and carriage, where they had left it. The view was grand and extensive.

Frank took his field-glass and surveyed the horizon, and then took a look at the Electric Man.

A smile played round his mouth as he looked. "They are two happy fellows, Barney and Pomp," he remarked. "They are seated on a boulder by the side of the Electric Man playing cards for amusement."

"Yes," added the professor, "they are happily constituted. They are brave, generous, full of rollicking fun, and as faithful as sunshine."

They went on down the mountain, making good time, when Varley was heard to utter an exclamation of both surprise and joy.

They wheeled and looked at him to see what was the matter, when they saw him tugging at a nugget of gold which he found projecting from the broken fragment of the rock.

"By heavens!" exclaimed the professor. "He has found another nugget!"

Reade and Bagstock both examined the nugget and mentally calculated its value, which was immense.

"You can't break that off without an ax or pick, Varley," said Reade. "Just let it be till we come up all together to-morrow."

"Will you recognize the claim as mine, sir?"

"Of course we will, and we'll help you work it, too."

"Ten thousand thanks, sir," said he. "That, with what I have already, will enable me to escape from Australia."

"Yes—but if you get out of Australia you will want money to live on and prove your innocence. So you must work diligently and abide your time. I'll stand by you and get you out when I go back."

Varley almost fell on his knees as he poured out his thanks to him for the assurance of his protection.

"It shall be the aim of my life to prove to you that your kindness and confidence have not been misplaced," he said.

"Then I shall be satisfied to the fullest extent, Mr. Varley," said the young inventor. "You may yet regain all you have lost."

"I shall try to, and gain or lose, I shall not forget your kindness to me."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ASCENT OF THE MOUNTAIN.

VARLEY was almost beside himself with joy over his lucky find.

He piled a number of loose stones about the nugget in order to mark the spot so that it would be easy to find again when they came up the next day.

Frank and the professor waited for him, and while doing so the latter discovered a rich vein of gold running through another large boulder.

"It is wonderful," he said. "Gold is everywhere, and yet I shudder to think how many human lives will be sacrificed in trying to get possession of it."

"When we find water there may not be any loss of life," said Frank.

"True, but where is the water?"

"Oh, we may find it yet."

"I hope so."

"I am ready to go on now, sir," said Varley, when he had piled loose stones enough on his nugget to hide it from view.

"Then come on," and they resumed their descent of the mountain.

They traveled fast, for the night was coming on apace. Already the sun was behind the mountain, and its great shadow was lengthening out miles and miles beyond the base.

"We'll have to hurry up," said Frank, "or we may get caught up here in the dark, when traveling would be very dangerous indeed. I wouldn't like to go stumbling about up here in the dark. I'd either ruin my shins or else break my neck."

"I don't think I could get along as well as either of you in the dark," remarked the professor. "So let's hurry down as fast as we can."

"Can you trot down hill?" Frank asked.

"I guess I can, though it has been a long time since I ran a foot-race."

"Well, let's try and see what you can do."

They started off on a trot down the smooth portions they had passed over as they came up.

But they had not gone two hundred yards ere the professor stumbled and fell sprawling.

A grunt escaped him loud enough to stop the other two and bring them to his assistance at once.

"Are you hurt, professor?" Frank asked, as he assisted him to his feet.

"I—I—don't—know," he replied, in a sort of dazed way.

"You ought to know."

"Well, maybe I am."

Frank could not repress a smile, and even Varley grinned.

"I am jarred all over," said the professor, pulling himself together. "I guess I won't run any more."

"But can you walk?"

"Oh, yes," and he started off with a slight limp.

They hurried down, and when they reached the base of the mountain the stars had begun to peep out.

The Electric Man was still a mile away, but Pomp and Barney had set the electric lights blazing, so that they could not lose their way.

In due time they reached the carriage, when the professor sat down on a stool and declared that he was never so glad to rest in all his life.

"You haven't done much traveling on foot, professor," remarked Frank.

"No, sir, not much; and I don't care to begin it at this time of life."

"No. It breaks a man up who is not used to it."

Pomp had a good supper ready for them, and in a little while they were lying around smoking at ease.

The long walk fatigued them just enough to induce them to retire early, and they did, leaving Barney and Pomp to divide the watch between them.

Morning found them up early preparing to begin the ascent of the mountain by the circuitous route which had been selected. After an early breakfast they started, the Electric Man seeming to be in a humor for a good run.

On reaching the base of the mountain Barney, Pomp and Varley got out to walk up, thus relieving the Electric Man of a very heavy burden.

On the way up Varley related to Barney and Pomp the story of the big nugget he had found up on the mountain's side.

They were deeply interested, of course, and kept a sharp lookout for something of the kind themselves.

When they reached the spot where Varley's nugget was they all stopped and prepared to assist him in the task of getting it loose from the grip of the stone.

Barney and Pomp got each an ax and began pounding the stone on each side of it. Constant blows soon reduced a goodly part of the stone to powder, making quite a hole all round the nugget.

By that means they secured about two pounds more of the yellow metal, when the lump was broken off.

"There you are," said Frank. "Almost a small fortune in one lump of the precious stuff. Two or three more like that will make you a rich man, Varley."

"Yes, sir, and I shall look out for more like it," said he.

"Well, we can't stop here any longer now," said Frank, re-entering the carriage and starting it off again up the mountain's side.

The others toiled along up the ascent, and in due time reached the top and stopped on the edge of the sandy plateau.

"Dis heah am de funniest mountin I ebber did see!" exclaimed Pomp, looking around in amazement at the level expanse before him.

"Begorra!" exclaimed Barney. "It has a desert av its own."

"Dat's er fac'."

They decided to stop there and take a look round the edge of the plateau for a while, the view from that point being one of the most extensive they had ever seen in Australia.

"How did dis heah sand git up heah?" Pomp asked, looking around in a puzzled sort of way.

"That is the question we want to solve, Pomp," said the professor. "It is one of the wonders of the world, and—"

The Electric Man, who had been left standing alone some hundred yards back, suddenly started off across the plateau at a brisk trot.

The whole party turned and gazed after him in a dazed sort of way, as if they could not realize that the carriage was running away from them.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank, darting forward at the top of his speed. "Catch him, or we are lost! Catch him! Catch him!"

Barney, Pomp, Varley and the professor all dashed forward at full speed in pursuit of the Electric Man, who seemed to be trotting leisurely away to certain destruction.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PERILOUS FOOT-RACE.

NEVER before in all his life did Frank Reade, Jr., feel that his life depended on his speed as a runner.

And never before did he recognize so keenly the desperate chances upon which his life, and that of his companions, hung, as when he started in a foot-race with the Electric Man across the sandy plateau on the top of those wonderful mountains.

He recognized the fact that the Electric Man was built to run all day, while it was not so with himself or his companions.

"Run, Pomp! Run, Barney! Run, Varley—professor!" he cried. "Our lives depend on catching him! Run for your lives!"

"Go theop!" yelled Barney, kicking off his shoes, throwing off his coat and hat, and darting away like a deer.

"Hi, dar, Barney!" cried Pomp, following his example. "Ketch 'im, Barney!"

"Make way there!" exclaimed Varley, throwing off his clothes as he ran.

Frank saw that the less clothes one had on the better he could run, and in a minute or two he began to cast off his clothes as he ran.

He scattered his clothes over the sand for the distance of a mile or more, by which time he was stripped down to good running condition.

Barney was far ahead by this time, and was gaining on the Electric Man, who was trotting leisurely along over the unbroken sandy plateau.

Varley was not far behind him, and it was nip and tuck with Frank and Pomp.

As for the professor, a half mile run over the sand used him up completely.

He sat down, blowing like a porpoise, giving vent to his fears in ejaculations that only served to increase his terror.

A stern chase is a long chase, say the sailors, and it proved to be the case with the Electric Man. Barney overtook the carriage just as he was ready to fall from sheer exhaustion.

He was so used up that he sat down in the doorway and panted as if for life, looking back at the others.

"Ah! Barney has caught up with it," exclaimed

Frank. "I won't run any more. Hold up, Pomp!"

"Afore de Lor, Marse Frank!" gasped Pomp, dropping down in the sand, "I nebber was so skeered in all my born days! Dat's er fac'!"

"Nor I, either, Pomp," replied Frank. "I'll never leave the thing by itself again. Hold up, Varley!"

Varley stopped.

But the Electric Man trotted on, with Barney seated in the door of the electric carriage looking back at them.

"Why don't Barney stop 'im, Marse Frank?" Pomp inquired, very uneasily.

"Barney is getting his wind," said Frank, gazing after the carriage, which was now more than a mile away.

They waited till a distance of two miles had been passed, and then saw Barney scramble to his feet.

"He'll stop him now," said Frank, as he gazed after the retreating carriage.

Barney managed to get on his feet, and went forward to touch the knob which controlled the electric machinery.

But when he hurried forward and reached out his hand he touched the wrong button. The Electric Man dashed away like a race-horse across the plateau, to the intense astonishment of the Irishman.

"Tare an' 'ounds!" gasped Barney. "Phat's the mather wid the ould man? Shure, an' it's runnin' away wid me he is."

Barney gazed out ahead and saw with what tremendous speed the Electric Man was going, and wondered where he would fetch up.

By and by he saw that he was nearing the other side of the plateau, and that a great rocky precipice yawned there.

"Howly Mither av Moses!" he groaned.

Then with a sudden desperation he bethought him of the handles of the guide crank.

He seized the right hand one and turned the Electric Man to the right, making a circle.

"Bedad, but it's a wise man I am," he said to himself in a sort of congratulatory tone as he found himself going in another direction.

When he was far enough around to face Frank and the others in the distance, he set the Electric Man to going straight ahead and let him go.

But he wondered what he should do to stop him. To run around the plateau all the time would not do at all.

He decided that he had touched the go knob instead of the reverse one.

Accordingly he pressed another knob, and the carriage came to a stand-still.

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, "that is the brake, is it? Shure, an' it's got yez I have. Now be off wid yez," and he pressed the knob he first touched with his thumb.

The result was the Electric Man dashed forward again.

In a short while he was up with Frank and Pomp and Varley. The professor was at least two miles further back, completely broke up.

Barney stopped when within a few feet of Frank, and said:

"Here he is, the ould spalpeen. Sure an' it's drunk I think he is."

"What was the trouble with him when you first caught up with him, Barney?" Frank asked.

"Bedad, but he was drunk. He laughed at me, an' rin wid all his might till I pulled his tail. Thin he turned round to run back an' tell yez about it."

Frank smiled, but the next moment said:

"It came near being the death of all of us, Barney. Had he got away from us we would never have seen our home again."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp.

Frank entered the carriage and took a drink of water. The run had made all of them very thirsty.

"Barney and Pomp," said he, as he looked around at the machinery, "we must never leave this carriage alone again for a single moment. It is too risky."

Then he started back to meet the professor and pick up the articles of clothing which had been thrown aside in the pursuit.

The professor was overjoyed at being once more inside the carriage.

"I never want to leave it again," he said, as he dropped down on the supply-chest and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"It was the worst scrape we have met since we left Sydney," remarked Frank.

"So it was. What do you suppose was the cause of the runaway?"

"I hardly know, unless there is a great deal of electricity in the air up here on this plateau."

"Would that cause it?"

"I think it would."

"Then we should stop and test the matter. If

that is true we ought to know it. It may be an important discovery."

"Yes, we'll take a run around the edge of the plateau and get some idea of the extent of it. It is the strangest idea I ever heard of—the finding of a sandy desert on the top of a mountain."

"Oh, the wind blew the sand up here," remarked the professor. "I am fully satisfied on that point, as it is finer than that on the plains, though of the same kind. That is the only reasonable theory one can form in regard to it."

They turned the Electric Man to the right and sent him trotting along the edge of the plateau, with the grim boulders on one side and the level sea of sand on the other.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAKE IN THE MOUNTAIN.

As they rode along the edge of the plateau they saw many large boulders, which seemed to have been broken asunder by some terrible convulsion of nature.

In some places the wall of rock rose a hundred feet above the plateau, while on the other side the mountain sloped down two thousand feet to the plains below.

They had traveled several miles this way when Frank saw what seemed to him the mouth of a cavern under some boulders just off the edge of the plateau.

"I want to see if that is really a cave there," he said, as he stopped and prepared to go out, "and, Barney, you remain here and see that the old man doesn't run away any more."

"Yes, sor," returned Barney. "I'll kape 'im still as a mouse."

They got out and went over the rocks to the mouth of what seemed to be a cavern. But on investigation they decided that it was more likely a crevice made in the mountain by some kind of a convulsion.

"Let's see what is in it, or where it leads to," suggested Frank.

"I'll follow wherever you lead," said Bagstock.

"Then come on," and Frank began to descend the side of the mountain to where he could reach the level of the entrance to the crevice, or cavern.

It was soon reached, and then they entered—probably one hundred feet below the spot where they had left the carriage.

"It is cool and pleasant in here," remarked Bagstock.

"Yes, indeed. I can feel a certain moisture in the air of this place."

"Of course, for the sunshine never reaches here. Did you ever see such evidences of a violent convulsion of nature anywhere?"

"I never did," returned Frank, "and I have been pretty much all over the world. Just look at that rock over there. It has been burst asunder, and looks as if it occurred but yesterday."

"Ah, this is interesting," remarked Bagstock, looking around, for they had not yet gone so far in as to be out of the light from the entrance.

But they pushed on, and in a few minutes Pomp stumbled and came near falling.

"Look out!" cried Frank. "You may fall into a hole a thousand feet deep."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp. "Dis chile doan't go no fuder in dar ef he ain't got no light."

Frank stooped, picked up a stone and tossed it forward.

To his astonishment he heard it splash in water.

"Dat's water dar!" cried Pomp.

"Yes, there's water there," said Varley, speaking for the first time.

"Water! Water, did you say?" cried Bagstock, rushing forward and trying to peer into the darkness beyond.

"Yes, listen," said Frank, as he tossed another stone.

The splash was heard again.

"It is but a few feet below us," said Frank, "and from the sound of the splash I should judge the water to be very deep."

"So would I. Varley, run up to the carriage and tell Barney to send me a lighted lantern, a rope and pail."

Varley hastened to obey, and at the end of ten minutes returned with the articles he had been sent for.

"Take the pail and rope, Pomp, and follow me," ordered Frank, who took the lantern and started forward again.

Pomp came close behind him with the rope and pail, ready to use them when wanted.

Frank walked forward a few paces, and then began to descend a sort of rocky precipice.

Going down about ten feet, he came to a large pool of water.

"Here it is—a pool, or lake," he said, calling back to Bagstock.

"What sort of water is it?" Bagstock asked. "I don't know. Dip up a pail full of it, Pomp, and carry it out to the light."

Pomp did as he was ordered, and Frank followed him out to the light, where the water proved to be clear as crystal and nearly as cold as ice.

"Let me taste it," said Frank, taking the cup and drinking some of it.

"Why, it's as fine, sweet water as I ever tasted!" he exclaimed, handing a cup full of it to the professor.

Bagstock drank a cup full of it, and agreed with him, saying:

"It is pure filtered rain water, Mr. Reade."

"Filtered rain water!"

"Yes—filtered through sand. I can understand this now. The rains which fall here at certain seasons filters through and settles in that pool or lake in there."

"Ah, that's simple enough," remarked Frank.

"The water must go somewhere."

"Yes, and that is where it goes."

"Well, I'd like to know what the supply is."

"We can find out, very likely."

"Yes; let's go back and see if we can get an idea of the extent of the cavern or lake."

Frank led the way in again and proceeded to seek a route around the lake.

But he soon found that he could not get around it, as the water seemed to be held in by perpendicular walls of solid stone.

Taking up a stone, he threw it forward as far as he could, only to hear it splash into the water. "That shows that it runs back a good distance," remarked Bagstock. "I wish we had a boat in which we could push investigations."

"So do I, but we haven't, nor is there any materials out of which one could be made."

"That's true. But this is a good supply, and shows that if provisions could be had life could be sustained while working for gold."

"Yes. Pomp, you and Varley will have to carry up water enough in pails to fill the tank."

"Yes, sah," responded Pomp.

"Let me carry up the first pailful," said Varley,

"and get another pail for myself."

Varley took up the first pailful of clear, cold water, to the great astonishment of Barney, who had not dreamed of such a discovery in that region of stone and dry sand.

"Bedad!" he exclaimed, "I'll have a swim in that same."

"It's too cold; it would kill you," said Varley. Barney drank some of the water, and decided that Varley was right. It was a little too cold for bathing purposes.

Being under the necessity of climbing up and down an altitude of one hundred feet with each pail of water, it took them several hours to get the tank filled.

By that time they had decided to spend the night there.

Pomp was ordered to prepare dinner whilst Bagstock and Varley went down with Frank again to make further explorations.

Frank took a long cord and tied a stone to it—threw the stone into the water and let it sink.

The cord was sixty feet long, but the stone did not reach bottom.

"By George!" exclaimed Frank. "This is a deep hole! There's water enough here to supply an army of workers."

"Yes, and the water is the best in the world," remarked the professor.

"How strange it is that neither birds or beasts nor reptiles are not to be found in the neighborhood of this water?"

"Yes—but this is a desolate region—the most desolate in the world, perhaps."

They went as far in as they could and then returned, climbing up to the plateau to rest and partake of refreshments which Pomp had prepared for them.

The day had waned so far that they did not go down the mountain's side again, but lit their pipes and sat down where they could look out over the dreary scene from the altitude of over 2,000 feet.

Down the mountain's side was nothing but broken rocks, and out beyond its base a vast plain of sand—sand everywhere.

Night came on and they slept better than ever before on account of the pure air at that altitude, and in the morning felt greatly refreshed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ELECTRIC MAN IN THE DESERT.

WHILE they were at breakfast the next morning Frank remarked:

"If we can manage to come back here and work for the gold in these rocks, we can lay claim to this water."

"Of course," said the professor, "but we could not keep others from it if they came."

"No—that's so. We could not refuse a man water."

"No. If we did, they'd kill us. People believe that air and water belong to the human race, and that no man has the right to charge for it—except when one digs his own well."

"Yes—it's good sense. But we could lay out claims and get the best pick of locations."

"Yes—so we can."

"All we need is food."

"Yes."

"And that we can obtain always in three or four days by going after it to the nearest river."

"Yes."

"With the right kind of tools we could soon crush out a fortune in gold."

"Yes."

"Ah! Had we found this water when we were here?" said Varley.

"But you didn't come this far along the mountain," said Frank.

"No, sir—not within fifty miles of it."

"But it would have done you no good, for you had little or no provisions."

"True, and yet had we found plenty of water we would not have suffered so much."

"True, but it would have been the same in the end."

"Yes, so it would, and yet we might have held out long enough to get gold enough to buy our way out of Australia."

"Doubtful," said Bagstock. "That was a hard crowd you were with. They would have held on to the last, and instead of going back, as you did, would have laid around here, because of the water, till death would finish you."

"True as gospel," said Frank.

"I don't know but that you are right. They are a hard crowd, and I am glad I am away from them."

"Of course. You are a decent sort of a man."

"Thanks," said Varley. "I appreciate that very highly."

Breakfast being over, they made preparations to go across to the other side of the plateau and seek for a passage down on that side of the mountain.

They started, and made a quick run over the level, sandy surface, and in a little while were looking out over the great, illimitable plains beyond.

As on the east side, they found boulders and fragments of broken rocks all the way down, and had to run several miles along the crest ere they saw a place that gave a promise of a passage.

It was dangerous traveling, and all walked save Frank, who guided the Electric Man cautiously. Barney and Pomp went on before to look out for rough places and signal to Frank which way to go.

Many places were dangerous, but the steady hand and cool nerve piloted the Electric Man safely through.

The descent was at last accomplished, and some time before the sun went down they emerged upon the sandy plain at the base of the mountain.

"Now for the great sandy desert," said Frank. "We have found gold in the mountains, and now let's see what the desert will pan out."

"Yes, it's an awful experiment, but we may as well try it and see what it amounts to."

"Well, get in, all of you, and we'll be off."

They entered the carriage, and Frank started the Electric Man off at a rapid pace—at least fifteen miles an hour.

The sand was smooth, with not a stone or mound in sight in front of them.

"We can set his pace and let him go alone," said Frank, "and have a game of euchre or seven up."

"Yes, so we could," remarked Bagstock, "only I am interested in this great basin here. I am curious to know if this ever was once the bed of a great sea."

"I guess you will find that a very difficult problem to solve," remarked Frank.

"But the salt in the sand might give some evidence of it."

"Yes, if you can find any salt in it. The wind and the rains have pretty well used up the salt," and Frank shook his head as he spoke.

"Just stop a minute or two and let me get a handful of the sand."

Frank stopped, and the man of science got out and scooped up a handful of the fine, clean sand and re-entered the carriage with it.

"It is nice, fine, beautiful sand," he said, as he sifted it from the right into his left hand.

"Yes, and there is plenty of it, too," said Frank. "Dat's er fac," assented Pomp; "nebbber seed so much sand in my life afore."

"You don't want to come here to live, eh?"

"No, sir—dat I don't."

"Nothing comes here to live," said Varley, "not even red ants."

"Bedad—even ants can't be afther livin' on sand," put in Barney.

"When night came they pushed on, the electric light blazing out with tremendous brilliancy. The way was so smooth that the Electric Man was permitted to run without much guidance, and mile after mile was thus passed."

When midnight came, Frank turned the watches over to Barney and Pomp, and he and Bagstock rolled in their berths to sleep.

Barney and Pomp divided the watches, and the carriage rolled on smoothly and without any diminution of speed.

In the early dawn Barney put out the electric light, and the gray light of coming day enabled him to see that he was in the midst of a boundless sea of sand, with not a break in any direction.

Even the mountains in the rear had disappeared during the night.

"Bedad," he said to himself, as he looked around, "this is ther biggest dry say I ever saw in me loife."

Pomp woke up and began to prepare for breakfast.

His movements awoke Frank and the others. "Where are we now?" Frank asked, looking around.

"Faith, an' I'd loike ter know that same," replied Barney. "Sure an' it's out av ther world we are going."

Frank laughed, and said:

"Well, I'll take our bearings after breakfast. We must have made a pretty good run during the night."

"So we did, sorr," replied Barney.

They ate breakfast, and then Frank took the quadrant and began taking their bearing.

He was patiently engaged, when a low, rumbling sound like distant thunder was heard.

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!" exclaimed Pomp, looking around. "Dat's thunder an' dere ain't no clouds!"

The sound increased, and seemed to come from the bowels of the earth.

Suddenly the earth heaved up like billows of the ocean, and the carriage was shaken so violently that Frank stopped the Electric Man.

"My God!" he gasped, "it's an earthquake!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EARTHQUAKE IN THE DESERT.

FRANK stopped the carriage and held on to the braces with both hands, for the earth trembled as if convulsed with an ague.

The Electric Man staggered as if it was difficult for him to keep his feet.

"Howly Mither av Moses!" groaned Barney. "Phwat is it?"

"Oh, de Lor' sabe us!" cried Pomp, completely demoralized. "De worl' am bustin' up."

Varley, who had been sitting on the chest, was shaken off to the floor, and a moment later the professor came down on top of him.

Barney undertook to hold to Bagstock, and went down with him.

His exclamations of terror aroused Pomp, who sprang to his feet, and, opening the door, leaped out into the open air.

Frank held on to his grip on the brace, and gazed around on the scene.

Immense clouds of dust and fine sand filled the air, and a rumbling noise like thunder under the earth was heard.

A little distance in front of them a column of sand and steam shot up into the air.

It was appalling to look upon, and no wonder Barney and Pomp were utterly demoralized.

They were not afraid of any danger arising from human agencies. Such dangers they had often met fearlessly.

But as to nature they were very superstitious, and this was a scene that completely unnerved them.

The earth trembled violently for over a half minute, and then suddenly ceased, as did the noises from beneath the earth.

"Here, Barney and Pomp!" called Reade, in authoritative tones, "hush that noise. The worst is over."

"Oh, Lor', Marse Frank!" gasped Pomp, "we're all done for, suah."

"It is all over now—you're all right, ain't you?"

Varley and the professor regained their feet, pale and silent.

Neither of them uttered a word till Frank spoke to them.

"A pretty bad shake up, professor," said Reade.

"Yes, sir. The worst I ever experienced. Is any damage done?"

"I don't know. The old man is on his feet yet."

"It would have knocked down any kind of a house or shanty," said Varley. "The steel man must be pretty steady on his feet to stand such a shock as that."

"Yes," said Reade. "He has pretty sure feet."

"What shall we do now?" Bagstock asked. "I hear escaping steam out there in front of us."

"Stay where we are till this dust settles. We can't see fifty yards away now. Come inside, Pomp, and show some little sense."

Pomp came back inside the carriage, trembling all over, and sat down on the chest.

They waited several hours for the dust to settle, which it slowly did, and then decided to remain there and see what the end would be.

"We may as well wait here all night as anywhere else," said Frank, "and start again tomorrow."

That evening the professor made the discovery that the barometer was falling very fast.

"We are going to have a storm," he said.

"What kind of a storm?" Frank asked.

"A rain-storm."

"Oh, come off, now!"

"Yes—look! A barometer never lies."

Frank had as much faith in the instrument as the professor did, and yet he could not but feel a little incredulous.

"It doesn't look much like rain," he said.

"No, but the convulsions of nature may produce it at any time."

"Yes, that's true. Put up the shutters, Pomp, and be ready for it when it comes."

"Let her come," said Pomp, as he proceeded to obey orders.

By and by the wind rose, and a heavy black cloud obscured the stars.

It blew harder and harder, till they could hear the sand raining against the sides of the carriage.

That lasted two or three hours.

Then they heard heavy rain-drops on the roof.

"There's the rain!"

Yes, it was the rain.

An hour later they took down the shutters at the end to look out at the rain and get a breath of cool air.

Rain, rain, rain!

It poured in torrents.

Daylight found the rain still coming down.

"Hello! the old man is up to his hips in the sand."

The exclamation came from the professor.

"That's a job for us," said Frank, as he looked out at the Electric Man. "The wheels are in up to the hubs, too."

"Yes, I knew the sand was drifting heavily," Bagstock said, "by the way it beat on the carriage."

"Well, we must dig out, that's all," said Frank, "and begin as soon as we have breakfast."

Breakfast over, they took spades and went to work, stripping as if going in swimming.

They worked hard and fast, whilst the rain beat down upon them with pitiless fury.

But each wheel was cleaned and an incline dug in front, the Electric Man included, and Frank started the carriage again.

The Electric Man easily pulled up, and then stood as erect as ever, whilst the others re-entered the carriage.

"No," professor, said Frank, "I am satisfied we can't cross the continent with our present supply of provisions."

"So am I, Mr. Reade. I was just thinking of that," was the reply. "I think we had better go back."

"So do I, and here goes," and with that Frank turned the Electric Man round and started off in the direction of the mountains again.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, unable to contain himself for joy.

"Hi, dar, Barney!" cried Pomp. "You're happy, eh?"

"Yes, yer nagur—whoop!" and then the two laughed and shook hands over the incident.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FLOOD.

THE heavy rainfall packed the sand to a hard, smooth surface, so that traveling was easy.

The rain didn't bother the Electric Man any. He had on no clothes to be spoiled, nor did he fear rheumatism from too much dampness.

"If we keep up at this rate for a couple of days we'll be on the mountain again."

"Bress de Lor' for dat," ejaculated Pomp.

"I notice you don't bother the Lord till you get into danger, Pomp," said the professor.

"How is that?"

"Yes, sah, dat's er fac'. I ain't as good er

nigger as I orter be, an' when I can't take keer ob myself I axes de Lor' to help me out."

"Yes, that's the way most people do. I was pretty badly scared myself, but didn't lose my head. I find that Providence never helps a man who doesn't help himself."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp; "but when er nigger is skeered almost to def he ain't got no sense, now."

"Dat's er fac'," remarked Barney, imitating Pomp's peculiar way of expressing himself.

Pomp's eyes flashed.

Had he been outside the carriage he would have butted Barney for the remark.

"An Irishman is even worse," said Frank—to give Pomp a chance at him—"for he has so many crosses to make and saints to call on that he is sometimes scared to death before he can get through."

"Dat's er fac'," ejaculated Pomp.

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, "a nagur is—"

"An Irishman turned black," said Frank, interrupting him.

"Dat's mighty hard on er poor nigger, Marse Frank," said Pomp, shaking his head.

Bagstock and Varley roared.

Barney saw that Reade was poking fun at him, and so wisely decided to say no more on the subject.

He looked out at the pouring rain as if he regarded it as an exceedingly interesting sight.

"This is the heaviest downpour of rain I ever saw," remarked Professor Bagstock. "There has not been a single break in it since it began."

"I have noticed that," said Frank, "and wondered how much more this sand will hold."

"That would be hard to say."

"Yes, I suppose it would."

"The sand is pretty dry, though."

"Yes, it was, but the sand is pretty wet now."

"How fast are we going now?"

"About ten miles an hour, I should say."

"That's good time when it's kept up for twenty-four hours."

"Yes, we could reach the mountains in one and a half, or two days at the furthest."

All day long the rain came down, and it began to tell on the sand, which could not absorb any more, at least did not take it so fast.

The result was the water began to run on the surface, and the huge feet of the Electric Man splashed it with tremendous force as he tramped furiously forward.

Slowly the water increased in depth, and came up about the ankles of the Steel Man.

Night came on.

The rain continued and the clouds overhead showed no break.

"We may as well stop and have a good sleep," said Reade. "The rain will surely be over by morning, and then we can travel all the faster. I don't much like the idea of running where I can't see the ground. If we should run into a hole it would be the last of us."

"Yes, but we are not likely to strike any holes in a desert like this," said Bagstock.

"That is true, and yet it is a risk. This is a strange country. We have found things in it which puzzle the wisest heads. It isn't like any other country, you know."

"You are right, I grant. I have no objections to stopping. We certainly have water enough for a camp."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp, with a broad grin on his black face. "But dar ain't no fish in it."

"Faith, an' it's right yez are, Pomp," put in Barney. "Bedad, an' it's all wather and no whisky."

"If this is the rainy season," remarked Bagstock, "it has commenced about two weeks ahead of the usual time."

"I guess it's the result of the earthquake," suggested Reade.

"Maybe so. I know that violent concussions, or convulsions of nature, have the tendency to produce rain."

They all retired to bed early that night, anticipating a long run the next morning.

Barney was the first watch, and he sat up and listened to the pattering rain till midnight came, and then Pomp relieved him.

"If dis heah rain doan stop," Pomp whispered to Barney, "we's gwine ter hab anuder flood, suah."

Barney rolled in and soon added his snore to the others.

But Pomp, on seeing that the rain continued, began to grow very uneasy.

He judged that the water was still rising, and that in time it would come up into the carriage.

He held his peace, however, till morning, and waited till Reade woke up.

"We's gwine ter git drowned, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp.

"Eh—what's that?"

"Look at heah! Dat ole man out dar is knee-deep in de water."

Frank sprang up and gazed out at the scene. The rain was still pouring down in torrents. And the water was still rising.

"Pretty big rain, eh, Pomp?" he said.

"Yes, sah—dat's er fac'."

"We can take a swim when it gets deeper."

"We'll hab ter swim den, sah."

Reade noticed that the water was running slowly in a south-easterly direction, as if to fill some depression out that way.

Bagstock and the others got up and took a look at the situation.

"We's all gwine ter drown suah," said Pomp.

"Why, how can you drown in water not three feet deep, Pomp?" Reade asked.

"By houldin' yer woolly head in it, begob," said Barney, before Pomp could make any reply.

"Shet up, yer Irisher!" cried Pomp. "I kin drown youse wid water in youse whisky."

"Thry it!" exclaimed Barney. "Av yez don't make it more'n half an' half, bedad, I'll dthrow the wather."

A little after sunrise the rain suddenly ceased. The sun broke through a rift in the clouds and gave a promise of no more rain—at least for a time.

"Hip, hip, hooray!" yelled Barney when he saw the sunshine.

"Bress de Lor'!" ejaculated Pomp, "I nebber was so glad ter see dat sun."

The vapors cleared away, and as far as their vision could reach was a sea of water moving slowly toward the southeast.

"I guess it won't take us long to get rid of this water," said Reade. "It not only moves away, but is soaking in the sand also."

"Yes; we may have dry sand to run on in a few hours," the professor said.

He was not mistaken.

The waters began to subside soon after the rain ceased to fall, and Reade prepared to move forward again as soon as he could see the bottom.

By noon the water was in shallow pools here and there, and broad patches of smooth, hard sand showed up.

"Now we are off," he said, and touching up the electric current, the Steel Man bounded away at a tremendous speed.

The sand was smooth and compact, making the best kind of traveling surface, and they never made such good time before as they did then.

The carriage seemed to be running over a velvet carpet, so soft and smooth did it run over the surface.

"We ought to get in sight of the mountains by sunrise to-morrow at this rate," said Reade.

"I hope we will," added Bagstock, "for since we have failed to get across the continent I want to get back there as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XXVII.

POMP AND BARNEY'S MISHAP.

WHEN night came on again and the stars came out more brilliant than ever, the Electric Man kept on his way at full speed.

In order to make sure that no accidents could happen, Reade lit all the electric lights, so that he could see more than two hundred yards in advance, and thus be able to see any obstruction or danger that might be in the way.

Reade stood at the helm till midnight, and then gave it to Barney to run three hours, after which time Pomp would take charge.

Thus the speed was kept up all through the night, making a run of over 200 miles before sunrise.

As soon as it was light enough for him to see Pomp yelled out at the top of his voice:

"Dar's the mountain!"

"Where?"

"Right ahead dar!"

Every one sprang up to take a look at the blue outlines of the mountain in the distance.

"Yes—there it is," said Reade, "and we are going straight toward it, too."

"Dat's er fac'," added Pomp. "We'll be dar bimeby."

All hands were happy, for the mountain was a change from the oppressive monotony of the plains.

"We ought to get there by noon," the professor remarked.

"Yes—and we will, too."

"All right. I don't care how soon we do," added Bagstock. "In fact, I don't care how soon we get on the other side."

"Nor do I."

"The expedition is a failure in the respect of crossing the continent."

"Yes, but only in that."

"Yes, only in that. Had we kept on we would

have been drowned by the flood in the central depression of the surface of the desert."

"Doesn't it strike you as rather queer that one should be in danger of being drowned in a wild desert?"

"Yes, it does. It would be laughed at as an absurdity in any other part of the world."

"Of course."

They bounded along over the smooth surface of the sand as fast as the Electric Man could travel, and the mountain became clearer to view every hour.

Pomp was very busy arranging things for a lunch, and had opened the door in the rear to throw out some scraps, when, by some mishap, he stumbled.

To save himself he grabbed Barney, who was seated near the door, and out they both tumbled.

Barney yelled as he rolled out on top of Pomp.

Such was the speed at which they were going that they both rolled over and over on the sand when they struck it.

"Hello!" cried Reade, when he saw what had happened, "what are the fools up to now?"

"It was an accident, sir," said Varley, who saw how it happened.

The Electric Man ran several hundred yards ere it could be stopped.

By that time Barney and Pomp were having a pitched battle.

Barney wanted to punish Pomp for pulling him out of the carriage, and Pomp objected—naturally.

"I must run back there or they may hurt each other," said Frank, and he started the Electric Man in a circle to get round to them.

Barney was on his feet trying to hit Pomp with his fists, and at the same time keep out of the way of that terrible head of his.

Finally, just as the carriage stopped within a few paces of them, Pomp butted Barney with such force as to knock him senseless on the sand.

"This is nice business for two old friends who have been traveling together for nearly thirty years," said Frank, as he descended from the carriage and confronted Pomp.

"Yes, sah—dat's er fac'," said Pomp, rubbing his ear, where Barney had planted a hard blow.

"What does it mean, anyhow?"

"Afore de Lor', Marse Frank, I didn't mean fo' ter do it. I was er fallin' outen de kerridge when I grabbed Barney to hol' on, an' he didn't hol' on, an' we rolled out on de groun'. Den he hab ter hit me," and he shook his head and rubbed his ear again.

Barney pulled himself together, raised on one elbow and looked around in a dazed sort of way.

He was a sick man.

A blow in the stomach by a hard butter like Pomp would make a rhinoceros sick.

He sat up and looked first at Pomp and then at Frank.

"I'll shoot the nagur," he said, as soon as he regained his speech.

"Well, if you do I'll see that you are buried in the same grave with him," said Frank. "What did you hit him for?"

"Bedad, an' didn't he throw me out av the kerridge?"

"No—he caught hold to keep from falling out himself, and you rolled out with him. It was an accident. I'm glad you got a head in your stomach."

"Bedad, me stomach is kilt entirety," and he looked sick indeed.

"Get inside—you two fools would eat each other up for no cause whatever, and—"

"Barney," said Pomp, "I didn't mean for ter do dat."

"Shake hands—it was all an accident," said Frank.

Pomp extended his hand toward Barney.

"Be me soul, but I'd loike ter bate that black head off av yez," said Barney, as he took the proffered hand.

"You are spoiling for a fight," said Frank, "and I believe it was a put up job between the pair of you."

Barney was disgusted at the accusation, and Pomp's ear was ringing from the blow he had caught there.

"It was an accident, sir," said Varley. "Pomp would have fallen on his head had he not caught hold of Barney. Barney tried to save himself, and they both went out together."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp.

The carriage finally started again, and the two combatants seemed to forget their trouble.

The carriage pushed on at a rapid rate, and the mountain loomed up grandly from the plain, with not a bush or shrub or blade of grass anywhere to relieve the monotonous dreariness of the scene.

At last they were near enough to make out objects quite distinctly.

"I don't see that the earthquake disturbed the mountain any," said Frank.

"Nor do I. It takes a pretty good shake up to do that," remarked Bagstock. "But if it did, it may interfere with our passage."

"Yes, that's what I was thinking about."

"Well, we'll have to chance that. The mountain is there, and we have got to cross it or go south to the end of the continent."

"That would be a long trip to make. We couldn't do it with our supply of provisions."

"No—hence our salvation lies in that direction," and the professor pointed his finger toward the mountain in front of them.

Mile after mile was passed, and they approached the base of the mountain.

"Hello!" cried Bagstock, a look of dismay on his face, "look there! There's a line of sand-hill breastworks in front of us."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CROSSING A LAKE.

THE exclamation of the professor caused Frank to stop the further progress of the carriage at once.

He stared at a long line of sand banks in front, which seemed to extend for miles to the right and left of them along the base of the mountain.

In some places it was but two or three feet in height, and much greater in others.

"What can it mean?" Reade asked. "They were not there when we came down."

"No. They were thrown up since we passed the mountain," returned the professor.

"Let me go out and see what it means?" asked Varley.

"Are you willing to take the risk?"

"Yes, sir."

He took a rifle and started out.

The sand banks were some two or three hundred yards in advance.

Varley marched steadily forward till he reached the base of the long line of sand banks and then stopped.

He was nerving himself to the task.

Then he ran up to the top and looked over.

Then, after a pause of some two or three minutes, he turned round and swung his hat in the air.

"Come on," he cried.

The Electric Man dashed forward to the base of the sand ridge where Varley met them.

"What is it?" Reade asked.

"Why the rush of water down the mountain cast the sand up there," he said.

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

Reade leaped out of the carriage and ran up to the top of the sand-bank to see for himself.

He was held spell-bound by what he saw.

All along the base of the mountain was a lake half filled with clear rain water.

It was from one hundred to two hundred feet wide.

The water had rushed with such force and in such volume down the rocky side of the mountain, that it had scooped out the sand and cast it up as was seen by the travelers.

"It must have been a grand sight," said Frank to the professor, who had joined them.

"Yes—it was a great cataract, for all the water had to run down, as it would not be absorbed by the rock."

"It must have resembled Niagara on a large scale."

"Yes—for it extended as far as the rain did."

"That water there is as clear as crystal."

"Yes—and is pure rain water, the best drinking water in the world."

"I'll have the tank emptied and refilled at once," said Frank, and in a few minutes Barney had turned the water out of the tank whilst Pomp and Varley proceeded to refill it from the lake.

While that was being done the young inventor and the man of science were studying up the situation.

The lake lay between them and the mountain, and would have to be crossed ere they could ascend.

"We have got to bridge this lake somewhere," said Frank.

"Yes—for it lies across our path."

"Well, we must run down alongside of it till we reach the spot where we came down the mountain, and then bridge it."

"How will you bridge it?"

"With spade and shovel."

"Oh!"

"A bridge of sand."

"Yes."

"That will be easy enough."

They re-entered the carriage and started off southward, keeping alongside of the lake all the time.

By and by they saw a place on the face of the mountain which seemed familiar to them.

Reade used his field glass and took a good look at the mountain, and remarked:

"I think there is where we came down."

"I am sure of it," said Varley, who had been looking that way for some time.

"Dat's er fac'," put in Pomp.

"Do you know the place, Pomp?"

"Yes, sah. I does for er fac'."

"Then we'll see if we can get up that way," said Reade.

"We've got ter swim dat lake, den," said Pomp.

"That depends upon the depth of it," replied Frank.

They got out and examined the ridge of sand in front of them.

It was about eight feet high, sloping gently outward toward the plains.

"See how deep the water is, Barney," Frank ordered.

In another minute Barney was stripped and wading in the lake.

The greatest depth was up to his waist, with a smooth sand bottom.

"Bedad," said Barney, "it's a foine swim I'll have," and he swam around with such evident relish of the sport that the others soon joined him in the delightful exercise.

"We must cut a channel through the ridge there," said Frank, as he stood in the water and looked at the sand-bank, "and by that time the water may be low enough to allow the carriage to cross without wetting our provisions."

The sun was about two hours high when they began work on the sand-bank.

It was near midnight when they finished the job.

"Now let's have a swim," said Frank, "and then go to bed. The water may be at least a foot lower by to-morrow noon. It is soaking into the sand very fast."

They all took another refreshing swim and then went to sleep in the carriage. They never had a more refreshing sleep in their lives.

When they awoke at sunrise they never felt more refreshed since starting on the expedition.

After breakfast Frank examined the water in the lake, and found that it had fallen about ten inches since sunrise of the day before.

"We can cross by noon," he said, "and then camp upon the mountain-top."

At noon they prepared to make the start.

They all entered the carriage and Frank started the old man toward the channel which had been cut in the sand ridge.

It was an easy passage.

The Electric Man waded in up to his thighs.

In just three minutes after entering the water the Electric Man was climbing up the rocky embankment on the other side.

"Now, all of you get out and ride up on your legs," ordered Reade. "If the big man's foot should slip there's no telling what might happen."

CHAPTER XXIX.

BARNEY AND THE EAGLE.

THEY all got out, save Frank, and began to ascend the mountain on foot.

It was not very steep, but they had to go in a sort of zig-zag way in order to pilot the way across the carriage.

Of course their progress was slow, for they had to stop at times to roll a stone out of the way, or guide the Electric Man with care and caution over some rough place.

But they reached the top at last, after about five hours of slow, patient work, and the sun seemed to have waited for them to do so before sinking below the western horizon.

"Ah, what a magnificent view we have from here," said Reade, as he stood and gazed out over the boundless desert they had just left.

"Yes," said the professor, "and it is a view no other people, save our party, ever had."

"Do you really think that?" Reade asked.

"Yes. How is it possible that any other people could have it? Certainly no white people ever came here, and the natives, having no conveyance but their legs, could not get up here."

"You are right. We are perhaps the only human beings who ever stood on the top of this mountain, or went out on that desert."

"Yes—you may rest sure of that," returned the professor.

"We may as well stop here for the night as anywhere else, and take a fresh start to-morrow morning. I hope we may be down where the gold is by to-morrow noon."

"So do I, and that we may all find as much gold as we can lift," added Bagstock.

"Howly mither av Moses!" exclaimed Barney.

"It's crazy we'd be wid so much goold."

"Dat's er fac," assented Pomp.

"Well, I'd take the chances of going crazy over it," said Varley. "I've been very near crazy several times for the want of a little of it."

"So have I," put in the professor. "In my young days I was often pinched for money to defray my expenses at college."

"I never knew what it was to lack money," remarked Frank. "My father could always command money with his inventions, and I had made a fortune myself before I was out of my teens."

That was more than the professor had ever heard Frank say about himself before, and he was very much interested.

"How I would like to read the history of your life, Mr. Reade," he said. "I am sure it would be very interesting reading."

"I don't know about that," returned Frank, looking amused at the idea of such a book being written.

"I am sure you could do nothing that would interest and encourage young men more," added the professor. "Your life has been a remarkably successful one, I should say. You are yet a very young man—still under thirty, and yet your name has been heard all round the world. You will be known a thousand years hence as the first man to navigate the air in an air-ship—to circumnavigate the globe with a flying apparatus."

Varley listened to the professor in the most profound amazement.

He had no idea that the young inventor was such a famous character as that.

He gazed at him like one looking upon a great king or emperor.

That night he questioned Barney and Pomp about their travels around the world in airships, and heard such wonderful stories that he could not make up his mind to believe them.

But Pomp staggered him with one yarn, and he said flatly that he wouldn't believe it.

Pomp appealed to Frank, and he repeated the story just as Pomp had told it.

Varley gave up, saying:

"The world has moved some since I left it. I am behind several years."

"Dat's er fac," said Pomp, at which the entire party roared with laughter.

They retired at an early hour, and slept well till morning.

Then they arose before the sun to see it rise out of the desert.

It was equal to a sunrise at sea, and the party enjoyed the view very much.

After an early breakfast they started across the sandy plateau on the top of the mountain to the rough edge of the crest on the other side.

It took them nearly an hour to get across.

The plateau was as level as a floor, and the tramp of the great iron man was scarcely heard as he flew over the sand.

By and by they reached the other side, where huge boulders of rock formed a boundary to the plateau.

Beyond the edge sloped the mountain toward the base, a downward grade from a height of over two thousand feet.

But they had to run several miles along the crest ere they found the place where they came up the first time.

And it, however, and began the descent.

As they did in ascending, so they did now—all walked but Frank.

Varley and Pomp went on before to pilot the way and make sure that the Electric Man should have a good footing.

So far as they could see, the earthquake had made no changes in the surface of the mountain.

But the descent was not as rapid as they expected it would be, as, by some mistake, they missed a part of the route they had come up by, and had to stop and move a number of stones out of the way.

At one time they stopped for over an hour on a sort of shelf where a boulder obstructed their progress.

Whilst they were pushing the boulder out of the way they were startled by a shrill scream overhead.

They all looked upward and beheld a large eagle sailing grandly around nearly a thousand feet above them.

Pomp made a dash for the carriage, where he secured one of the Winchester repeating rifles.

"You can't hit 'im, Pomp," said Varley, as he looked up at the great height of the bird.

Pomp was too eager to make any reply, but ran out, aimed at the imperial bird and fired.

The eagle seemed to start as if the ball had whistled pretty close by him.

"Give him another," called out Frank, who knew that the rifle could carry a ball twice the distance.

Pomp aimed and fired again, and the eagle concluded that he had better stop circling and make a straight cut for the other side of the mountain.

"Hold on dar!" cried Pomp, giving him a third shot.

That one hit him, breaking a wing, and the great bird came tumbling earthward, screaming all the way down.

"Dat got 'im!" yelled Pomp.

"Bedad, but the nagur could shoot a star out av the sky," said Barney, who always admired Pomp's skill with the rifle.

Barney, Pomp and Varley started toward the spot where they saw the eagle would fall—some fifty yards higher up on the mountain.

The bird struck with a thump that could have been heard a couple of hundred yards away.

But still the unbroken wing in a measure broke the force of the fall.

When the three men reached the spot they found the eagle on his feet, as defiant as lightning and fierce as a tiger.

Barney rushed up to grab him by the neck and make him a prisoner.

The eagle raised one of its feet and grabbed Barney by his left leg.

Well, a dog with first-class teeth could not take a more penetrating hold than the four claws of an eagle.

"Ugh! Ouch! Take 'im off!" yelled Barney at the top of his voice and dancing around like a lunatic, dragging the eagle with him.

Then he fell down, and he and the eagle rolled about fifteen feet down the mountain-side, he yelling murder and the eagle screaming shrilly.

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!" gasped Pomp, when he saw how the two were mixed up, "jes' look at dat Irisher."

Varley dashed at the eagle to take him away, when the fierce bird made a dash at him, and Barney rolled out of his reach.

CHAPTER XXX.

DOWN THE MOUNTAIN—VARLEY'S LUCK.

THE screams of the eagle and yells of Barney caused Reade and Bagstock to rush to the spot.

Barney had just escaped from the bird, and was rubbing his leg and showering blessings on the whole feathered kingdom.

"Haven't you any better sense than to tackle a wounded eagle, Barney?" Reade asked, as he saw the blood stains on Barney's trousers.

"I didn't tackle 'im, sorr," replied Barney ruefully. "The dirty baste av a birrud tackled me, bad cess to the loikes av 'im."

"What did you go so near to him for? You have had experience, enough with eagles to know what they can do."

Barney was in too much pain to relish a lecture just then, and so he took up a stone, and was about to smash the offending bird, when Frank stopped him.

"Don't kill 'im! If his wing only is broken we can save his life and take him home with us."

"Better mind 'bo't dat eagul," said Pomp, who had a wholesome fear of the breed of birds.

Frank walked around the bird and viewed him from every point of the compass.

He saw that the bullet had broken its left wing near the second joint.

"We must catch him and cut the wing off where it is broken," he said, "and then tie him to the top of the cage. The wound will heal and we'll have a prize in him."

"You'll hab de ole Nick in 'im," said Pomp, shaking his head. "Dem eaguls is wuss den snakes."

"You must keep away from him if you don't want to get hurt," said Bagstock, who was quite anxious to secure the prize.

"Dat's jes what dis heah chile wants ter do, sah," said Pomp.

Barney had gone down to the carriage to get some salve for his wound.

Frank sent Pomp down to get a bag to throw over the eagle.

When the bag arrived he threw it over the bird, who fought and screamed in a most savage way.

They succeeded in catching its feet and neck, and then held it till Reade had amputated the broken end of the wing.

Then they secured him and conveyed him to the carriage, when he was tied on top where he could survey things without doing any mischief.

"You will have a sore leg for a few days," remarked Frank, as he looked at the wound on Barney's limb.

"Bedad, but it's sore now."

"Yes, I guess it is. You want to let eagles alone, you know."

They then resumed the descent of the mountain, making slow progress, in order to avoid accidents.

Suddenly Varley made a dash to the left and ran about thirty yards, as if impelled by some impulse which he could not resist.

"Bedad, but it's crazy he is," said Barney, as he gazed after him.

"Ah! he has found a nugget," exclaimed the professor.

Barney and Pomp sprang forward and were at his side in a moment.

They found him tugging at a nugget which protruded from a broken rock several inches.

"Bring me an ax," he cried, as he held on to the yellow lump as if he feared it would crawl into the rock if he let go of it.

Pomp ran back and got an ax for him.

He seized it and began pounding on the stone near the nugget.

"Hold on there," said Frank. "Don't strike so hard. Striking hard will ruin the ax, whereas if you use but half the force you will wear away the rock and not use the ax entirely."

Varley did as he was told, and found that it was true.

But it was a tedious job, and while he was pounding away at it the others strolled about and found a number of small nuggets—just large enough to excite them to a frantic search for more.

Hour after hour passed, and still Varley was pounding away on the stone.

Perspiration poured from him.

The excitement and the vigorous exercise was telling on him.

Barney offered to relieve him, but he would not accept the offer. He was afraid the other would have a claim on the nugget if he did.

Frank saw that the nugget was likely to prove a big one, and decided to wait there till he secured it, if he worked all night.

The sun went down, and the stars came out to find the man still pounding away on the stone.

Pomp carried his supper to him, and he stopped long enough to thank him and eat it.

Then he resumed work again, and kept at it till midnight, when the stone cracked, and the nugget was wrenched out.

It was a heavy lump of pure gold, and the poor fellow was overjoyed at his good fortune.

"You waited for me, Mr. Reade," he said, as he laid the battered ax and the nugget down at the young inventor's feet, "and I want to thank you for it. Such kindness touches my heart, sir," as he hastily brushed a tear from his eyes.

"I could not have done otherwise, Mr. Varley," said Reade, "and I am glad you have been so fortunate in securing the whole lump."

"Thank you, sir," said the poor fellow. "I shall give you credit for all the good luck I have in the rest of my life."

He placed the nugget in the chest with the ones he had already found, and then climbed into the narrow berth to sleep till morning.

They woke up at sunrise.

The scream of the eagle on top of the carriage broke their slumbers.

"He is as good as an alarm-clock," remarked Frank.

"An' as bad as er mad dog," said Pomp.

"I guess he's hungry."

"Dis chile ain't er gwine ter gib 'im no meat."

"Oh, I'll feed him," Frank said. "You get breakfast and I'll look out for him."

While Pomp was preparing the meal Frank tossed a piece of cold meat upon the top of the carriage.

The hungry bird seized and devoured it with voracious gusto, and then seemed to look to the donor for more.

"Hanged if I don't believe I can tame 'im," exclaimed Frank. "But I won't feed him any more till we get where we can kill some game for him."

The meal over, they resumed their journey down the mountain-side toward the vast plain beyond the base.

They succeeded in getting back into the opening which they had struck when they went up on that side.

Then the descent was much more easy and rapid.

Once they came to a place where the descent was quite steep and the great weight of the Electric Man gave him a momentum that came near proving the destruction of the whole team.

He made a dash and ran nearly fifty yards ere Frank could put on force enough to stop him.

Had he gone ten steps further a collision would have resulted in a wreck.

"That was a narrow escape," said Frank, as

he looked back up the incline. "I would not like to risk it again for \$10,000."

"The worst is over now," said Varley, who was leading the way along through the opening.

They passed along through the big boulders, and gradually got down to the base of the mountain.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, who was anxious to stop walking so he could get into the carriage and nurse his wounded leg. "It's glad I am ter get down on the ground agin."

The eagle screamed because Barney whooped, and Pomp sung out:

"That bird wants ter shake hands wid yer, Barney."

"Shake yet feet wid im," retorted Barney.

"Hello!" exclaimed the professor, stooping and picking up an old worn slouch hat which lay at his feet. "Look at this! It was not here when we came by on our way up!"

They stopped, crowded around the professor to look at the evidence of the presence of man in that locality.

"Come in!" cried Frank from the carriage.

"There is danger here!"

They rushed for the carriage.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

THE call of Reade caused the party to scramble within the carriage with all possible speed.

Varley was the one to enter last.

He held the hat in his hand.

"Let me see that," said Reade.

Varley gave it to him.

He looked at it carefully for a minute or two, and then said:

"It was dropped here since the big rain."

"Yes, sir. I think so too," assented Varley, "and it has a very familiar look to me."

"Eh! Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"How so?"

"It looks very much like the hats worn by some of the convicts when I was with them."

"What! Like those worn by Crowley's crowd?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, they were hereabouts when we met you the first time. The rain would have beaten it almost to pieces and washed it into some crevice of the rocks."

"It would seem so."

"Is it possible that Crowley and his crowd could have come back here to the mountain after the experience of their first trip?"

"It is hard to tell what they would or would not do," said Bagstock, who had been a quiet listener to what had been said.

"I guess you are right there, professor," said Reade. "They may have secured a good supply of provisions and made a second march to the mountain. If they did they have more nerve than I have been disposed to give them credit for."

"It would require a great deal of nerve to try it over again after their terrible experience of the first time."

"Yes. I can't think they have come back here. This hat must have come from another party altogether. However, we'll be on the lookout and not take any chances," and with that Reade started the Electric Man up again and carefully pushed his way along through the opening among the rocks which had afforded them a passage over the mountain on their first trip.

"I don't think there is any party here but our own," said Reade, after they had gone about a half mile through the winding channel among the rocks.

"It is hard for me to believe that there is," assented the professor, "and yet I am sure that some one has been along here since that terrible rain. That hat is a fact I can't get around."

"That's so; and facts are very stubborn things sometimes, aren't they?"

"Indeed they are."

"Look out dar!" cried Pomp, as the Electric Man was about to run up on a big boulder lying directly in his front.

"Hello!" exclaimed Frank, bringing him to a halt with a sudden turn. "That boulder doesn't belong there!"

"Well, it's there, anyhow," remarked Bagstock.

"Yes, and it got there after we passed here," said Reade, as he glared at the rock.

"Are you sure we passed here?"

"Yes, I know several landmarks."

"Yes, so do I," put in Varley. "I know the way well. We came right along here—didn't we, Pomp?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, the earthquake must have shaken that rock loose up on the mountain somewhere, and sent it rolling down on the path here," remarked

Frank, as he looked at the boulder. "It's going to worry us to get it out of our way, too, for it must weigh several tons."

"I don't believe we can move it," said Bagstock, "unless we have crowbars, which we have not."

"But we've got to move it," said Reade. "We can't stay here always, you know."

"Maybe we can find another passage if we go back a half mile or so."

"Well, we'll try and see. If we can we shall be saving ourselves some pretty hard work."

They managed to make a short turn, and then proceeded to go back through the opening they had just come in the hope of finding another passage through the field of broken stone.

They moved back about the eighth of a mile, when Pomp exclaimed:

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!"

"What's the matter, Pomp?" Reade asked.

"Dar's anuder rock in de paf out dar," and he pointed straight ahead to another big boulder in the path in front of them.

Frank opened wide his eyes and stared as if confronted by a ghost.

The professor was equally as astonished with him, and gasped out:

"What does it mean?"

"It means that we are caught in a trap," replied Reade, his eyes blazing with the light of battle.

"A trap, is it?" said Barney, looking at the boulder out in front. "Sure, an' it's meself as can bate the head off av any spalpeen as wud do the loikes av that."

"Somebody has rolled the boulders down into the passage for the purpose of stopping us."

"Do you really think that?" Bagstock asked.

"Can you account for this in any other way?"

"Well, no, I cannot."

"Then I am right. They are laying for us behind these boulders somewhere, either to shoot us down, or capture us as we get out to remove these obstructions in our pathway."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Wait till we can see who our enemy is," was the reply.

"But we may have to wait a long time."

"Well, we can wait as long as any other party can, for we have provisions and water, and it's not likely that they can be as well supplied as we are."

Reade turned the Electric Man around and walked him back toward the first boulder.

When about half way between the two the halted and said to those in the carriage:

"All keep quiet now as if nothing had happened to stop us. If we take it easy they'll show their hands maybe, and then we'll find out who they are."

"You are not going to try to roll that boulder out of the way?" Bagstock asked.

"Why, no. That would be doing what they want us to do," replied Frank. "I am not going to play into their hands that way. They'd have a chance to shoot us down the moment we were out of the carriage."

The professor turned pale at the thought of such a danger, and said no more about it.

He and Reade each took a book from the chest and sat down to read, and Barney and Pomp joined in a game of cards, whilst Varley declared he'd keep an eye open for a glimpse of the enemy.

But the day waned and the sun went down without anything having been seen or heard of the enemy.

"They are very patient," said Reade, in a whisper, "but we can be as patient as they. They'll show themselves soon, never fear."

"It can't be Crowther's crowd," said Varley, after a pause of some minutes.

"Why not?"

"Because I can't believe that he has so much prudence or patience to play us such a game."

"Well, we'll see."

As the night advanced a profound silence fell upon the world around them.

Varley wanted to go out and hunt around for the unknown enemy, but Reade would not consent to it, and so they all, save the watch, went to bed and slept.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VARLEY'S EXPLOIT.

WHEN morning came the watch declared that nothing had been seen or heard of the enemy.

"Well, we'll look out for him to-day," said Reade, "but under no circumstances must any one expose himself to the fire of a concealed enemy. I don't want to have a wounded or dead man on my hands."

They proceeded to take things easy during the day, just as they did the day before, expecting every hour that the enemy would show himself.

Late in the afternoon Reade's patience began to give way, and he said to Bagstock in a low tone:

"I'd rather have a hard fight and take the chances than sit here cooped up this way."

"So would I," was the reply.

Varley whispered to Reade:

"Let me go out in quest of them after dark, and I'll find out all about them."

"Do you think you are equal to the task?"

"Yes, sir. Have I not defied the constabulary for years in the bushes?"

"Very well, I'll trust you. What weapons do you want?"

"A revolver and a knife."

"You shall have them," said Frank.

When the stars came out and darkness had well settled down on the scene, Varley, well-armed, slipped out of the carriage.

Being without shoes, he stepped forward with noiseless tread, crouching the while below the boulders on that side of the channel.

Then he began crawling around among the boulders, listening for the faintest sounds.

But nothing could he hear.

Yet he would not relax any of his caution, but kept on hands and knees crawling among the rocks.

At last he concluded to cross over on the other side of the passage and see if he could find anything over there.

On that side he crept along down to a spot near the boulder which had stopped the progress of the carriage.

There he became satisfied that he could hear the breathing of some one behind the boulder next to it.

To creep around to the other side of it was the task he set himself to do, and never did mortal man move more stealthily than he.

On the other side he caught a glimpse of a man leaning against the rock and peering cautiously around at the carriage and Electric Man.

Varley stood there and gazed at the dark figure pressed against the rock for some ten minutes or more, and then crept away from the spot in order to decide what was best to do.

"That fellow is simply a sentinel," he muttered to himself. "The others are about here somewhere, and I want to find out where they are and who they are."

Then he began crawling around among the boulders, and for more than an hour he was searching for the party he believed was about in the vicinity.

Suddenly he heard a sound somewhat like one shoring in his sleep, and following it among the boulders, he came across a party of men, ragged, uncouth, but well armed, so far as he could see. It was entirely too dark for him to make out whether or not they belonged to Crowther's crowd.

But he managed to understand the situation.

"They have set a man to watch," he reasoned to himself, "and if our party leaves the carriage to roll the boulder out of their way he is to give notice so they can slip around and ambush us. That is the game. I'll see if I can't spoil it a little bit."

Back he creeps to where the lonely sentinel watches from behind the boulder, and begins to crawl upon him with a cat-like caution.

Suddenly he taps the man on the shoulder from behind, and then claps a revolver to his head, saying:

"Utter a sound and you are a dead man!"

The man stood stock still.

He dared not open his mouth.

"Come with me," said Varley, taking his arm and leading him out from behind the boulder and toward the carriage.

Reade heard footsteps approaching, and was on the alert.

"Mr. Reade?" called Varley, in low tones.

"Is that you, Varley?" Reade asked.

"Yes, sir. I have caught one of them."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know, sir, as he has not spoken yet. There's a lot of them back behind the boulders there. This fellow was watching the carriage and the boulder in the pass."

Varley spoke in a whisper and Frank did likewise.

"Did your crowd roll that boulder into the pass?" Reade asked of the fellow.

"Yes," was the gruff reply.

"To stop us?"

"Yes."

"Is Crowther in the crowd?"

"Yes."

"You were to give the signal if we attempted to roll that stone away, were you not?"

"Yes."

Frank then had him brought inside the carriage and bound and gagged.

Then he left the professor in charge of him and

the carriage whilst he and the others crept forward to the boulder and proceeded to try their united strength upon it.

After a careful inspection Reade decided to roll it to the left, and all four put their shoulders to the boulder and pushed with all their might.

The heavy stone was moved, and in another moment rolled completely over, leaving space enough for the Electric Man and carriage to pass through.

"Now, come away," whispered Frank, leading the way cautiously back to the carriage.

"The way is clear now," Reade whispered to the professor.

"Well, I am glad to hear that, I am sure," was the reply.

"Take that fellow out and lay him on the ground," said Frank.

Barney and Pomp quickly laid him on the ground, and then hastened to get into the carriage again.

All was done without a word having been spoken above a whisper.

When all were inside again Reade was about to turn on the electric current and set the steel man moving, when a groan from the bound man on the ground attracted his attention.

"See what he wants, Varley," said Reade.

Varley got out, went to him, and, removing the gag from his mouth, asked:

"What do you want?"

"Give me some water," said the man. "I am dying of thirst."

He gave him a pint of water and then said:

"I'll not put the gag on you again, but you want to keep quiet for at least ten minutes after we start."

He then re-entered the carriage, and Reade said:

"All ready now! We are off."

Suddenly the electric lights blazed out, making the scene around them as bright as day.

The next moment the Electric Man stepped forward and his heavy tread sounded clear and distinct on the still night air.

"They hear us sure," said Varley, who thought he had never heard the old man put his foot down so heavily before.

But the boulder was passed, and then a yell of triumph burst from Barney, Pomp and Varley.

It was answered back by yells from those who had been alarmed by it, and the next moment men were heard running around among the rocks in a state of terrible excitement.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ESCAPE—AN ACCIDENT.

SATISFIED that he was now safe, Reade felt like exulting too.

He sung out at the top of his voice:

"How are you, Crowther!"

Crowther made no reply.

Frank was really anxious to see him after the trouble he had caused the entire party.

"I say, Crowther!" he called to him again. "Your man is lying over there tied up. You had better look after him."

The enemy was careful enough not to show himself for fear of a bullet from the carriage.

The electric light gave a good view of the rocks, but not one of the enemy could be seen.

"They may roll another stone into the pass," suggested Professor Bagstock. "So you had better be on the lookout for that."

"Yes," said Frank, "we'll run out to the open place and stop for the night. I want to find out if this party have found any gold worth landioneing."

The Electric Man dashed away along the passage, and in a few minutes was out in the open country again where no obstacles could be thrown in the way of his progress.

"Varley," said Reade, when he stopped the carriage, "we are indebted to you for this piece of good luck. You got us out of that scrape like a good general."

"I am glad I did, sir," was the reply. "I am sure I would do anything to serve you."

"Well, you did us good service to-night, for which we give you a vote of thanks."

Varley then told the story of how he found the man who was on guard, and the plan he adopted for his capture.

"He was the most astonished man you ever saw," he said, "but had the good sense to say nothing when he found my weapon at his head."

"Did you count the number in the party you found back behind the other boulders?" Reade asked him.

"No. I could not see them all, as some were lying so close under the rocks that I could not make them out."

"I guess it's the same old crowd," Reade remarked.

"Yes. I think so myself," put in Varley. "But

I can't see what brought them back here after the terrible experience they had on their first visit."

"Maybe they thought that after the rain there would be plenty of water here for them," suggested Bagstock.

"So there is, if they only knew where to look for it."

They lit their pipes and indulged in a good long smoke, keeping the electric lights burning, that the enemy might know where they were.

At last the lights were put out, and all went to bed except the one on watch.

Pomp had the first watch, and he kept his eyes and ears open for anything that might come along.

But when his time was up nothing had broken the silent monotony of the night, and he called Barney to take his place.

Barney had had a good nap and was fresh and bright when he took Pomp's place as watch.

He had been up about an hour when he saw a dark object on the ground not ten feet away from the carriage.

At first it seemed like a log lying on the ground.

He looked at it and wondered how it was that he had not noticed it before.

As he was gazing at it he imagined he saw one end of it move.

Then, all at once, his suspicions were aroused, and he glared at the object like a cat eyeing a mouse upon which she is about to spring.

Cocking his revolver, he hissed in low tones:

"Halt there, ye spalpeen!"

"Don't shoot," came from the ground. "I want to join you."

"We don't want the loikes av yez," returned Barney. "Sure an' it's meself as wants ter bate yer head off av ivory mitthers' son av yez."

"What is it, Barney?" Reade asked, suddenly waking up and hearing their voices.

"Sure an' it's wan av thim," replied Barney.

Reade got out of his berth and said:

"What does he want?"

"Sure an' he wants me to shoot him."

"Don't shoot," said the man on the ground.

"I want to surrender and go with you as Varley did."

"You can't do that—we don't want you," replied Reade. "We haven't room for any more."

"But I'll walk all the way if you will only give me food and protection."

"No, we won't saddle ourselves with any of you. You are a bad lot. I couldn't trust you."

"But you trusted Varley and—"

"So I did, but he proved to us that we could trust him before we did. Is Crowther with you back there?"

"Yes."

"What is he doing?"

"He is our leader."

"Why did he lead you back here to starve?"

"He talked us into it."

"Well, let him talk you out of it if he can. If you fellows would cut loose from him and go back to the wooded section where there is game you would get along better."

By this time the professor and Varley were up listening to what was being said.

"Do you know that fellow?" Reade asked of Varley, in a whisper.

"Yes, sir. He is a hard case."

"They all are, as for that matter," said Frank, and then turning to the man, said to him:

"Go back to your gang. We won't have anything to do with you."

"They will kill me if they know I have said anything to you about going with you," said the man.

"We won't give you away, but the sooner you fellows get rid of Crowther the better it will be for you."

The man turned away and disappeared behind a big boulder.

Reade then questioned Barney, and learned of the way he discovered the fellow's approach.

"He was up to a trick of some kind," said Frank, when he had heard the story. "We may as well move from here now as at any other time."

He woke up Pomp and made preparations to leave that spot forthwith, not knowing but what the villains might be able to do some damage to the Electric Man or carriage.

Starting the electric current, the lights flashed out, and the Electric Man dashed away at a rapid speed just outside the field of broken rock.

After a mile or two was passed, and the little party were in a good humor over having gotten away from the enemy, when the Electric Man suddenly became lame—only one leg would work—and the whole team stopped and a moment or two later the lights went out.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE sudden stoppage caused an exclamation to burst from every one in the carriage.

Reade was the first one out.

The Electric Man could use only one leg.

The other one seemed to be paralyzed—could not move.

"What's the matter, old man?" Frank asked, looking at the man of steel.

The others got out and crowded around to see what the trouble was.

"What's the matter?" Bagstock asked.

"Something gone wrong," Reade replied.

"Anything serious?"

"I don't know. I'll have to open him and see."

Something may have broken loose inside."

"How far are we from those fellows now, do you think? I don't want to have them around any more."

"Some five or six miles, I should think."

"Could they reach us before you could repair damages?"

"I don't know. It depends upon whether they undertook to follow us or not. I don't think they did, however."

"How long will it take you to do the work?"

"An hour, a day, or a week—don't know."

Here, Pomp, get me the tools from the chest. I'll open his side and see what the trouble is. Very likely a screw or bolt has worked loose, and if that's all we can be off again in an hour."

Pomp proposed to take no chances with the Crowther crowd, so when he brought out the tools he brought a Winchester rifle with him.

"Put that gun back," ordered Reade. "We want to work just now."

Pomp put it back and went to work helping Reade make a hole in the side of the Electric Man.

Reade opened a section at the hip-joint and made an inspection by means of a small lantern.

"Ah, just as I expected," he exclaimed, after a pause of some minutes. "A screw has come out and dropped down into the leg."

Getting down on his knees, he detached the huge iron foot and found the screw lodged in one of the numerous joints.

"I've got it," he said.

"Good! We are in luck after all," said Bagstock.

Reade took the screw and put it in its proper place, and then secured it as well as he could under the circumstances.

Then he closed up the section again and put the foot in place, and proceeded to make other examinations as to the condition of the machinery.

"He is all right now," he said, as he placed the tools back in the carriage.

"Will he travel?" Bagstock asked.

"I guess he will."

They all got in and Reade started up the battery again.

The Electric Man moved off as life-like as on the day he took his first step, and Reade said:

"He is all right. I should have examined the machinery thoroughly before this. When we reach game and water I shall overhaul him and tighten every screw and oil his joints."

"Yes, I should think that would be a wise precaution, Mr. Reade."

"Yes, wise always. But I have neglected it because I had so much faith in his vitality. I'll look after him a little more closely hereafter."

They moved forward some twenty miles or more, and then decided to stop for the night.

Right out there on the great plain they stopped, put out the electric light and went to bed with Pomp on the watch.

During the night it rained, and when morning came they decided that the regular rainy season had set in, and that it would rain every day for months now.

"Let it rain. We can stand it," said Frank.

"It lays the dust and cools the air."

"And raises the rivers," suggested the professor.

"Oh, we can build rafts as we did before. One can't expect to travel in this country without experiencing some inconveniences."

"Yes, that's so. But I am not sure that it is safe rafting on a stream which has swollen to an angry torrent."

"Well, don't borrow trouble till it is forced upon us."

They ate a hearty breakfast and then started off at a rapid pace, going in the direction of the river.

"Crowther and his crowd will have a wet time of it now," remarked Varley, who was thinking of the wretches who had given them so much trouble.

"Yes," said Frank. "They have no shelter, but I suppose they are used to that."

"Somewhat. But heretofore they have been able to build some kind of a shelter of bushes in the timber."

"Well, they won't find any timber convenient this time."

"No; they will have to take the rain as it comes, and all their ammunition will be ruined," remarked Varley.

The rain poured down during the greater part of the day, but along in the afternoon it ceased, and the sun shone out again.

"This is all right," said Reade. "It makes traveling easier for the old man."

They pushed on as fast as they dared to go, and a little while before sunset came in sight of timber in the distance.

"I guess we'll find game enough there," said Varley. "Water and timber and game go together in this country."

"Well, you ought to know if any man does," said Reade.

"Yes, I've been here long enough, I am sure," was the reply.

That night they spent in the edge of the timber, and early the next morning Reade and Varley were out in quest of game for breakfast. They soon had pheasants and rabbits enough for a score of men, and Barney and Pomp went to work preparing the meal.

At breakfast it was decided to make a run of about one hundred miles along the river in order to make sure that Crowther's crowd could not reach and give them trouble.

"Then we'll spend a day shooting game and putting up provisions for the home run," said Frank.

The meal over they set out.

By and by the rain began again and poured till in the middle of the afternoon, when it ceased for the day.

Then they stopped and enjoyed shooting till the sun went down, satisfied that the parties who had given them so much trouble could not do so again.

The evening was a pleasant one to them, for they believed that all the dangers of the trip were over, and that in another week they would re-enter Sydney, and astonish everybody with the wonderful story they had to tell.

During the night the river rose from a sluggish stream to a raging torrent.

"You can't cross that torrent, Mr. Reade," said the professor, shaking his head.

"Well, I can go round it, I guess," replied Reade.

"What! Go round a river!"

"Why, yes, why not?"

The professor whistled.

"What's the trouble about that, professor?"

"Well, I've never heard of a man going round a river before."

"That's nothing. I've been all round the world. I don't mind such a little thing as a river. A couple of hundred miles or so and then we'll turn the headwaters and go on our way rejoicing."

Professor Bagstock smiled, and remarked:

"I don't wonder at the name you have made in the world, Mr. Reade. A man who makes light of great obstacles will find a way to overcome them."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SINGULAR MEETING.

HAVING laid in a supply of game, Reade started the Electric Man to run parallel with the river, keeping just outside the timber.

The surface was quite level, and the gallant man of steel and iron reeled off the miles at a rapid rate.

The rain came down again, but it was like summer rains, gentle and without winds.

Frequently they would cut across an open space to cut off a bend in the river, and thus save miles of travel.

In the afternoon the rain ceased at the usual hour, and the rest of the day was good sunshine and beautiful scenery.

Under the influence of rain and genial sunshine the grass sprang up out of the earth and began growing at a prodigious rate, spreading a green carpet as far as they could see.

Twice during the afternoon did they shy off to pass round pieces of timber, throwing them many miles out of their way.

But the Electric Man trotted along at a steady gait, never tiring in the least.

As they were turning a piece of timber very late in the afternoon they ran into the edge of the woods, passing under some very large trees.

Suddenly they were startled by a series of wild yells which made their blood run cold for a few moments.

The bushes were alive with natives who

swarmed about the carriage and Electric Man like so many bees.

"How! Moses!" gasped Barney, grasping his revolver.

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!" ejaculated Pomp.

Bagstock and Varley said nothing, but seized their weapons for instant use.

"Hold on!" cried Frank. "Don't fire! Leave 'em to me!"

They had seized hold wherever they could get a grip, yelling like so many lunatics, thinking they had made an easy capture of the strange invader of their domain.

After a pause of a few minutes Reade turned on the electric current to give them a shock.

The first shock raised hair and yells at the same time.

Then they tried to let go, but could not.

The electric current had contracted the muscles of their hands to such an extent that they held on like grim death.

They screeched and yelled like so many lunatics, some of them leaping and throwing their heels as high as the top of the carriage.

It was a perfect pandemonium of yells and howls, and Barney and Pomp joined in with them to help out the noise.

Finally Reade decided that he had given them enough, and cut off the current.

Every one who had a grip on the carriage, or Electric Man, dropped to the earth, too much used up to stand on their feet.

The others slunk away into the depths of the forest, too much in awe of the terrible thing that had mastered their comrades to do battle against it.

As soon as they could pull themselves together the sufferers followed them and disappeared in the woods.

"There's nothing like electricity to take the courage out of a savage," remarked Reade, as he saw them sneak off into the timber.

"They can't understand the source of its terrible power," returned the professor.

"No, and as for that, there are millions of people in Europe and America who can't, either."

"I believe you are right there. But those fellows got a heavy dose."

"Yes, and they'll be cautious about tackling anything belonging to white men again."

The Electric Man was started up again and soon passed the timber where the natives had sought shelter. Once more out in the open prairie they pushed on, keeping the river on their right all the time.

But now and then they would strike a piece of timber that seemed to obstruct their passage completely. Yet they would make long detours and go round them.

In front of them was an open, treeless plain as far as the eye could reach, and they made a dash for the greatest distance that could be made before darkness set in.

But night overtook them at last and they stopped, not wishing to travel when they could not see the timber along the river-bank on their right.

It made no difference to them where they spent the night so long as they were not in an unhealthy locality.

The next morning they were off again before sunrise, and by noon came in sight of more timber directly in front of them.

Ere they came within a couple of miles of the timber the rain ceased and the sun came out in all its glory.

"There's a smoke over there in that timber," said Varley, turning to Reade.

"Eh! Is that so?"

"Yes, sir—right through there," and he pointed in the direction of a thin column of smoke that rose above the tree tops.

"I wonder if that comes from natives or white men?" said Reade, as he gazed at the smoke.

"It comes up from a cabin, sir," said Varley. "No camp-fire could live in the rain which has just let up."

"Well, we'll soon see about it," and Reade turned the Electric Man in the direction of the spot whence the smoke ascended.

Ten minutes later they came in sight of a cabin in the edge of the timber.

A half dozen half-clad white children were playing round the door when the carriage dashed up.

"A settler, by all that's holy!" exclaimed the professor.

The Electric Man terrified the children when they saw it, and they dashed into the house screaming at the top of their voices.

A moment later a stalwart woman appeared at the door of the cabin, gun in hand, staring in open-eyed wonder at the new comers.

"What in creation is that?" she demanded, gazing at the Electric Man.

"Are you a white woman?" Reade asked in respectful tones.

"Of course I am," she replied, with a broad English accent. "Can't you see that for yourself. But who are you?"

"I am an American," replied Reade, "traveling for pleasure. Have you a husband about here?"

"Yes—I'll call him in," and she fired off her gun in the air.

Five minutes later a rough-looking, unkempt man appeared, gun in hand, and asked:

"What is it?"

"I don't know," replied the woman. "He says he is from America traveling for pleasure."

The man came forward with suspicion clearly betrayed in his face, saying:

"If you are Americans it's all right. It's not every one I would let stop here."

"How in thunder came you to stop here?" Reade asked.

"I wanted to get as far away from the world as I could," was the reply. "I have been happier out here than in all my life before."

"And does your wife like it too?"

"Yes, as well as I do."

"There is a mystery here," whispered Reade to Bagstock. "Let's camp here for the night."

"I've no doubt of it. Stop by all means," Reade turned to the man and asked:

"Have you any objections to our stopping here for the night?"

"No, if you are from America," was the reply.

"Oh, we are from America," said Reade, and then they began to get out of the carriage.

"What kind of a thing is that you have hitched to your wagon?" the woman asked, coming forward, no longer able to restrain her curiosity.

"It is an Electric Man," answered Reade, "made of steel, and runs by machinery. We use him instead of a horse, as he never eats or kicks."

The couple stared in amazement at the wonderful thing, and their half-clad children crowded around listening to what was said.

While Reade was talking to the couple Barney and Pomp went to work to put up the tent and build a fire.

Pomp soon began preparations for supper.

"Cook double to-night, Pomp," said Reade to him. "I am going to ask our kind friends here to take supper with us."

The woman wheeled and ran into the house; whence she returned ten minutes later in a dress which had evidently been held in reserve for many years.

Her husband looked at her with admiration.

"My wife is a proud woman," he said, "and she has the right to be."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SOME STRANGE REVELATIONS.

KNOWING they were to have guests for supper, Barney and Pomp took pains to prepare a most excellent meal.

The woman watched them with an eager expression on her face, and the moment she caught a whiff of the fragrant Java she exclaimed:

"Andy Willcraft! They have got coffee!"

"Eh! Coffee?"

"Yes, real coffee! Don't you smell it?"

The man sniffed the air and heaved a sigh of satisfaction as he caught the fragrant aroma.

The moment the man's name was called Varley sprang to his feet and gazed at him like one in a dream.

Suddenly he rushed to the man's side, clutched his arm, and asked:

"Are you Andy Willcraft?"

The man started, gazed half savagely at Varley, and asked:

"What's that to you?"

"It is a great deal to me. My name is Varley."

The man staggered as if stricken a terrible blow, and Varley drew his revolver.

"My God!" gasped the man, turning deathly pale. "Sarah, here he is!"

Sarah screamed and sprang before her husband.

"Spare him! Oh, spare him!"

Reade sprang forward and caught Varley's arm, asking:

"What does it mean?"

"He is the man whose false evidence sent me here a convict!" exclaimed Varley, hoarse with rage.

"Good heavens! Is that so?"

"Yes—he is the man."

"Well, it's wonderful. But keep cool. Let me manage him for you."

"Don't shoot!" cried the man in abject terror behind his wife.

"He won't shoot," said Frank, turning to the

trembling wretch, "unless I tell him to. Now what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing!" cried the woman, clapping a hand over her husband's mouth. "He has nothing to say!"

"Are you sure of that, ma'am?" Reade asked. "Go into the house, Andy. We won't eat supper with 'em to-night."

"Stop!" sternly ordered Frank, who saw what her game was. "If you don't tell all you know about this case I'll let Varley open fire on you!"

"He'll have to shoot me first," said the woman, resolutely, planting herself before her cowering husband.

"One bullet will settle you, ma'am," said Varley. "What is one woman's life to the twenty years I have spent as a convict? By the powers above us, if you don't stand aside and let him speak without interference, I'll shoot you as I would a dog!"

His fierce manner dismayed her, and she tremblingly asked:

"Would you shoot a woman?"

"Do you call yourself a woman? You are a fiend in woman's form! Stand aside or I'll fire!" And he aimed at her head.

She stepped aside.

"Go into the house," he said to her. "No harm shall come to you or him if you keep your mouth shut. Go, I tell you."

The children screamed and clung to their mother's skirts.

"Go into the house, ma'am," said Frank. "Your interference may provoke bloodshed."

"Spare my husband," she pleaded.

"Yes, if you don't interfere."

She turned and went into the cabin, followed by her children.

"Andy Willcraft," said Varley, when the woman had gone, "you remember my last words to you when I was led away from court to be transported for life?"

"Yes," gasped Andy.

"I said that I would live to have your life for having sworn mine away. Now if you do not right that wrong I'll kill you where you stand."

"How can I do it?"

"You swore falsely against me, and it was your evidence that convicted me of a crime of which I was innocent. You were bribed to do that. Here are witnesses. Tell them the truth, or die like a dog!"

"Yes—yes, I'll do that," he said. "Then I'll be easier than I have been in years. I have never been able to shake off the fear that you would some day turn up and kill me for what I did, and that is why I came to Australia a few years after you were sent to Tasmania. Lord Salliston, who succeeded to the title and estate after your transportation, gave me a good sum of money on which to live in Australia. One day I heard that you had escaped, and fearing that you would come to Australia, I came way out here to be out of your way."

"Who killed James Tipton?" Varley asked.

"I don't know; but he who is now Lord Salliston paid me to swear that you did."

"Yes—yes. But have you any proof that he bribed you?"

"Yes. My wife knows that he did, for he gave me one thousand pounds for doing so."

"Does any one else know it?"

"Yes—my brother in Cornwall knows it."

"How came he to know it?"

"He overheard us talking one night, and has made the lordship support him ever since."

"Now you and your wife must go back to England with me and swear to this in open court."

"We have no money."

"I have enough gold to get you there."

"But my children?"

"They can go too."

"Yes," said Reade, who now saw that Varley was indeed an innocent and much wronged man—"they can all go."

"Do you hear that, Sarah?" Andy cried out. "We are all to go back to old England—back to our old home."

She ran out of the cabin and shouted for joy. Then she checked herself and said:

"But, Andy, Lord Salliston will have us both murdered, to save himself, the moment we land in England."

"Not so," said Frank. "I'll see that you are protected. Rest easy on that score. How does the supper get on, Pomp?"

"Mos' ready, sah," replied Pomp, who had lost none of the strange revelations in regard to Varley, who was, by right, Lord Salliston of England, and not a real convict.

The family ate supper with them, after all.

The delight of the children was unbounded. But Varley was the happiest of all that night.

"Varley," said Frank, extending his hand to him, "I'll congratulate you now, and pledge my

honor to see you through, if it costs me ten thousand dollars."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ARRIVAL IN SYDNEY.

DURING the evening, as they were seated around the camp-fire, Varley told the history of his life to Frank and the professor, telling many things he had not mentioned before.

"Why did you not tell us you were the right-ful Lord Salliston?" Bagstock asked, when he had finished his story.

"Because I knew you would not believe me," was the reply.

"You are right," said Frank. "We could not have believed a word of it. But we believe it all now."

"Yes," said Bagstock. "We know now that you have told the truth. I congratulate you, my lord."

"Don't call me by that title. Let it be plain Mr. Varley till this stigma is removed from my character."

"That is the better way," said Reade. "Keep quiet on that point till we get to England. What we have to think of now is how we are going to get these children to Sydney."

"They can walk every step of the way, sir," said Willcraft.

"It is too far," replied Frank, shaking his head. "They and the mother must ride. Some of us must take turns at walking."

They retired at a late hour and slept comfortably, save Varley, who watched the cabin to make sure that Willcraft did not give him the slip.

But the man was glad enough to get a chance to go back to England, with the hope of protection from the very man he had feared above all others.

He was the first one to greet Varley the next morning, and said:

"My wife and I are both very glad that we have had the chance to undo the mischief of twenty years ago."

"Well, so am I," replied Varley, "but those twenty years can never be wiped out. Their terrible scars will go with me to my grave."

"I suppose they will, my lord, but my conscience drove me into an exile but little less uncomfortable than yours. I don't suppose I shall ever be happy again, save when I see you in the enjoyment of what is justly yours."

Preparations to leave the cabin went on whilst Pomp was preparing the morning meal.

The children were overjoyed at the idea of going. The mother was equally as happy, but was quite overcome when Reade told her that she could take nothing with her but what she and the children wore.

"Whatever is needed for the voyage home," he said to her, "will be bought for you in Sydney—everything new."

That reconciled her, and after breakfast she and the children entered the carriage with Reade and the professor, whilst the other four men walked.

Willcraft knew every foot of the country. He told Frank how he could save at least fifty miles by making a certain point on the river where there would be no trouble about crossing.

Of course the traveling was very slow, as the Electric Man had to wait for those on foot, who could not keep up with him.

That evening they encamped on the banks of the river, and stretched the tent under which the men slept.

After an early breakfast they resumed the trip, keeping the river on their right, till late in the afternoon they reached the point where Willcraft said it could be forded.

The river was half a mile wide there—on a sand-bed.

Reade shook his head as he looked at the stream.

"I dare not undertake it," he said.

"The deepest part is not over three feet in depth," said Willcraft, "and I'll prove it to you."

With that he started in to wade across.

When in the center of the stream the water reached only to his hips.

"Come back!" called Reade.

He came back, and then Frank said to him:

"Pilot the way and I'll follow."

He did so, and Reade started the Electric Man in after him.

The bed of the river was a compact sand bottom, and in a half hour the carriage was on dry land on the other side.

Putting the mother and children out and leaving them in charge of the father, he rode back across after the others, whom he brought safely over.

They then made a few more miles before making a stop.

On the way Barney shot and wounded a big male kangaroo so badly that he could not jump. On running up to the game he found him ready to fight.

"Look out there!" cried Varley and Willcraft in a breath.

The warning came too late.

The kangaroo, with a face which betrays the timidity of the hare, is nevertheless dangerous when wounded, as Barney found to his cost.

The wounded game struck at him with his long hind leg, the sharp-pointed hoofs of which cut like a knife.

"Howly Moses!" gasped Barney, springing back, "the baste carries a knife with him!"

He drew his revolver and shot him dead on the spot.

"Are you hurt?" the professor asked, running up to him.

"Bedad, I'm kilt," was the reply, and he showed a cut on his thigh where the sharp hoof had struck him. It was more painful than dangerous, and Barney had learned a lesson he did not know before.

Frank stopped long enough to bandage the wound for him, and then the trip was resumed, to be continued till night overtook them.

At the end of five days they had passed the mountains which separated them from the coast, and had struck the Sydney road which ran along by the Parramatta river.

The mother and children had stood the trip well and were in fine health and spirits.

"We shall be in Sydney to-morrow," said Reade to Willcraft and his wife, "and before we get there I want to give you both some instructions as to what you must do. When you reach the city you must not breathe a word to any one as to who you are or where you are going. Varley will take you to a small hotel, and a dress-maker will supply all the clothing needed by the mother and children. You must hint to no one as to who he is. Whatever he tells you to do you are to do without asking any questions or making any objections. We are going to see you through to the end, and no harm shall come to you by reason of the past. Now do you both understand?"

"Yes, sir," they both replied.

"All right then. That's all I wanted to say."

They pushed on down the river road and struck the little town of Parramatta, where Varley and Willcraft donned new suits of clothes at Reade's expense.

That night they encamped by the road-side, and early the next day started for Sydney, which they expected to reach some time in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BARNEY AND THE POLICE.

It was some little time after noon when, as they struck the crest of a hill, that they caught sight of the church steeples and public buildings of Sydney.

They set up a shout of joy.

"Bress the Lor!" cried Pomp, who was tired of the march on foot.

"Now, Varley," said Frank to that individual, "I want to go into the city just as we left it. If we go back with one more than when we left questions will be asked."

"Yes, sir, that's true," said Varley.

"Well, you wait here with the family, and I'll send a carriage back after you and them."

"That's a wise precaution," said the professor.

Varley and the Willcrafts sought a good place by the road-side to rest and wait for the arrival of the carriage, and the Electric Man dashed on toward the city at a slashing pace.

As they entered the suburbs of the city they were recognized and a great shout went up from the people on the streets.

The people poured out of their houses to see what the hubbub meant, but Frank dashed forward till he reached the mayor's office, in front of which he halted.

The mayor was in, and when he saw the Electric Man and heard the shouts of the people he came out to welcome Reade back to the city.

Such a crowd gathered around the Electric Man that a platoon of police was sent to keep them back.

"I am glad to see you back, Mr. Reade," said the mayor. "I welcome you to Sydney."

"Thanks, mayor," responded Reade. "We are glad to get back, I can assure you, for we have had a hard time of it."

"I congratulate you on returning in good health," added the mayor. "Will you alight and come into my office?"

"Not now, Mr. Mayor. I wish to see the Electric Man into quarters, after which I will report to you with Professor Bagstock."

"Your old quarters are still at your command," said the mayor. "You can take possession at once."

"Thanks. I will go there, then, if the police can open a passage for me through this crowd." The mayor spoke to the officer in charge of the platoon, and in another moment the policemen were opening a passage for the Electric Man to pass through.

It did not take them long to reach the building where the Electric Man and the carriage were put together when they arrived in Australia.

But hundreds rushed in with them when the door was opened, and the police had a busy time in driving them out.

"Now, Barney," said Frank to his faithful man, "step outside and hire a carriage to go for Varley and the Willerfafts," and he handed him some money with which to pay for it.

Barney watched his chance and slipped out unperceived, and made his way to a livery-stable, where he found a good carriage at his service.

But he could not make the thick-headed driver understand exactly what he wanted him to do, without saying more than he thought was prudent, so he sprang into the carriage himself and ordered him to drive on.

In about an hour he reached the spot where Varley was waiting for him.

They all crowded into the carriage, and were driven into the city, where they took up their quarters in a very unpretentious little hotel.

Having performed his task, Barney returned to the warehouse to report to Frank.

He found the building in charge of the police, and Pomp inside in command of the Electric Man.

"Stand back there," said the policeman at the door, as Barney tried to enter. "You can't go in there."

"P'what's that?"

"You can't go in there without a permit from Mr. Reade," said the officer.

"Faith, I run wid ther masheen," said Barney. "My name is Barney O'Shea," and he attempted again to enter the door.

"Stand back or I'll run you in," said the officer.

"Bedad, av yez thry it," returned Barney, "it's a sick spalpeen ye'll be."

"I will, eh?" and the officer grasped his club and approached him menacingly.

"Yis, bedad," and Barney spat in his hands preparatory to a tussle with him.

"Hole on dar!" cried Pomp, who had heard Barney's voice and came to meet him. "Dat's Barney, ossifer. He belongs heah."

"Whist, Pomp," cautioned Barney. "Would yez spoil a ruction wid the spalpeen?"

The officer heard the remark, and it so enraged him that he gave the Irishman one with his club.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, and he went at him like an avalanche.

They were mixed up for a moment or two, and then the officer went to grass with a thousand stars flashing before his eyes.

"Whoop! Hut me again! Gimme me anither witt!" and he danced around the prostrate officer like a jumping-jack.

The officer pulled himself together and got on his feet.

But he was scarcely balanced on his pins when Barney sent him sprawling again.

"Bedad, it's wake in the legs ye are," said Barney, tauntingly.

"Barney, come in heah, yer fool Irisher," cried Pomp. "Youse am gwine to make trouble, suah."

"Whoop!" yelled the Irishman, who didn't care two cents for all the policemen in Sydney at that moment. "Show me the man as—"

"I se de man," cried Pomp, darting forward and catching him around the waist. "I se de man what's got yer now," and he ran inside with him, dropped him on the floor and looked the door ere he or the officer knew what he was up to.

"Open this door!" called out the officer, in authoritative tones.

"Go away, dar, I tole yer!" responded Pomp. "Dat Irisher is er bad man. He broke youse neck if youse doan go er way dar."

"Open the door or I'll break it down!" cried the officer.

"Oh, the darlint!" cried Barney. "Lave me at 'im!"

"Hole on dar, Barney. Marse Frank will be mad as er hornet if youse make trouble heah."

That recalled Barney to himself, and he kept quiet. But the officer had summoned assistance and threatened to break the door down.

But Pomp refused to open the door, and the result was the gathering of another great crowd of people to see what the trouble was.

When they heard the story the crowd sided with Barney and hooted at the officers.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TEMPTING OFFERS.

As is the case in most large cities where a turbulent element exists, a blow brought on a collision.

More police came, and the trouble soon assumed the dimensions of a riot.

Reade was with the mayor when the news came that a riot was going on at the place where the Electric Man was stopping.

The mayor promptly ordered his carriage and drove to the spot accompanied by Frank.

When they heard that the police wanted to arrest Barney and Pomp both were very much astonished.

But Pomp's explanation was deemed satisfactory by the mayor, and he ordered the police to let the two men alone and disperse the mob.

They had their hands full for an hour or two, but finally succeeded, by the aid of a platoon of police who were sent from headquarters, in dispersing the mob.

But the officers were mad.

They vowed to club the Irishman if he ever came outside the building.

Barney chuckled, and was quite anxious to give one of them the chance to do it.

But he didn't care to tackle a whole platoon of them.

The excitement of the riot, however, was as nothing compared with that which followed the report Reade and the professor made to the mayor of the city and the Geographical Society. It set the city wild.

The sight of the heavy nuggets of pure gold which they exhibited completely wiped out the story of their sufferings and the perils of the journey to the gold mountains.

Companies were formed to open mines out there, but how to get there was the problem.

"Reade is the only man who can get us there and sustain us while at work," said a rich banker, "and we must get him to do it, let it cost what it may."

A committee from one of the companies called on him three days after his report was made public, and said:

"Mr. Reade, we desire to engage your services as general manager of the Interior Mining Company of Australia, at such salary as you may name."

"I am much obliged to you, sir," he replied to the spokesman of the committee, "but I am not open to an engagement of that kind. My inventions are worth more to me than any company in this country can afford to pay me."

That knocked them out, and they went back to report to the directors of the company.

"By all means purchase the Electric Man from him," suggested one, "or get him to make us one. One of his men can run it, I've no doubt."

That was a good idea, they thought, and so the committee called on him again and said:

"The people of Sydney desire to have the Electric Man remain in this country. If you will name a price for it the money can be raised to purchase it."

"It is not for sale, gentleman," he replied. "It is going back to America with me."

"But is there no sum for which you would sell it?"

"No. It's the secret of its mechanism—not the machinery—that I wish to preserve."

"But can't you sell the machine and keep the secret?"

"No. Any good mechanic can take it to pieces and duplicate it."

"Then why not sell the secret?"

"Because I wish to retain it to apply it to other inventions I contemplate bringing out in the future."

The committee went away, and another conference was held by the directors of the company.

A day or two later a man came to the warehouse and asked for Mr. O'Shea.

"That's me name," said Barney, coming forward.

"Glad to see you, sir. Can you come out and talk business, Mr. O'Shea?"

"Yes, bedad, or have a ruction, aither," was the reply, as he left the building in charge of Pomp.

Out on the corner below he found a carriage.

"I want you to go with me to a hotel, have a dinner and bottle of wine with me," said the man, "and then we'll talk business."

Barney went with him, feeling able to take care of himself anywhere, and in another minute they were whirling through the streets toward the King's Arms' Hotel, where they alighted and went in.

There the man gave orders for a sumptuous dinner for two, and then called for a bottle of wine to be sent up to a private room.

Up in the room the man said his name was Hayward, and then opened the bottle of wine.

They both pledged each other in a glass of the sparkling beverage, and then the man said:

"I have been sent to see you, Mr. O'Shea, by a syndicate of rich bankers of Sydney—"

"P'what's a syndicate?" Barney asked.

"A syndicate is a company of men organized for a purpose—a ring, you may say."

Barney understood that.

The man continued:

"I have been sent to make you an offer which we want you to consider well before you make an answer. We have heard wonderful stories of the finding of gold on your trip, and want to know from your lips if they are true."

Barney told him a yarn that made his head swim.

"Now, Mr. O'Shea, we want to engage you to manage the company out there for us. We will give you \$20,000 a year cash as salary, and \$100,000 worth of the stock."

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, "yez could coax the birruds off av the bushes."

"There are few birds who would refuse the offer," said Hayward. "Have another glass of wine, and he filled Barney's glass again. "Just think of it. You could return to Ireland in five years worth a million dollars, and be the biggest man in it. It's money that makes the man nowadays."

"Begob, an' so it does."

"Well, what do you say to it?"

"Whin I see Misher Reade I'll—"

"But we don't want you to mention it to him, because there are others who are trying to get ahead of us. You must keep it a secret till after we are all fixed."

"Yis, sorr," replied Barney.

"Will you go into it with us?"

"Yis, bedad," was the reply.

Rap—rap—rap on the door and Hayward sprang up with a look of annoyance on his face and hastened to the door.

CHAPTER XL.

BARNEY ESCAPES A TRAP.

THE raps on the door both startled and annoyed the man Hayward.

He rose from his seat and opened the door to see who it was who had interrupted him.

"Are you Mr. Charles Hayward?" a man asked of him as he opened the door.

"Yes, that's my name," was the curt reply.

"Hello, Varley!" cried Barney, rushing to the door. "Faith, an' I knew yer voice. Come in, now, an' have a drink wid us."

Hayward was terribly annoyed when he saw that the two men were acquainted, and hence suspected that the new-comer had followed purposely to be invited to wine and dine at his expense.

Barney caught Varley by the hand and pulled him into the room.

"This is me friend, Misher Varley," he said, introducing him to Hayward.

The two men bowed, and Hayward asked:

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit, sir?"

"To the fact that His Honor the Mayor of Sydney sent me to ask you to repair to his office at once, as he wanted to see you on an important business."

Varley's reply staggered him.

Why did the mayor send for him at that particular juncture?

He was half inclined to doubt the truth of his words, and asked Barney:

"Do you know this man, Mr. O'Shea?"

"Yis, sorr," was the prompt reply.

"He is all right, is he?"

"Yis, sorr."

"Then you will please excuse me for a half hour or so till I ride to the mayor's office to ascertain what he wants with me," and he hastened to leave the house and re-enter the carriage, which still stood at the door.

"Do you know that man, Barney?" Varley asked as soon as Hayward's footsteps had died away on the stairs.

"Yes. His name is Hayward," was the reply.

"Yes, but do you know what he is up to, Barney?"

"Sure an' I don't. He axed me to ate dinner wid him, and I said I would."

"You would do better to eat dinner with Old Nick, Barney," said Varley, very seriously.

"Phat is it, anyhow?"

"He is laying a snare for you. He is the tool of a party of rich men who want to use you for a certain purpose. They hope through you to persuade Reade to make up something like the

Electric Man, with which they can work the mines at the gold mountains. Then when they get things into their own hands overboard you go."

"Bedad!" exclaimed Barney, making a rush for the door.

"He has gone now," said Varley, "and the best thing we can do is to go too," and he took Barney by the arm and led him down-stairs and out on the street.

"Now let's go back to the Electric Man, and say nothing about where you have been," he suggested to Barney, as they walked along the street.

Barney agreed, and on their arrival at the warehouse Pomp let them in. He at once became suspicious, for he saw that Barney had been drinking.

Varley, however, said nothing till after Barney laid down and went to sleep. Then he said to Pomp:

"I overheard two men talking of a plot to steal the Electric Man and run off with it, taking either you or Barney along to run it. I kept an eye on them, and to-day I saw one of them come here and take Barney away with him."

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!" exclaimed Pomp, "an' I didn't butt 'im!"

"No, for you didn't know the game."

"Dat's er fac'."

"I followed them and found 'em in a room in a hotel with a bottle of wine. In another hour they would have had him in their power. Don't say a word about it to any one. I think you and Barney can take care of the Electric Man if you keep your eyes open."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp. "Oh, golly, don't I wish I could butt em one time," and he shook his woolly head in a way that showed he had not forgotten how to use it in a scrimmage.

When Barney woke up from his nap he had quite a head on him.

But he said nothing to Pomp as to how he got it.

On arriving at the mayor's office and ascertaining that he had not been sent for, Hayward was furious.

He ran out, sprang into the carriage, and told the coachman to drive to the Kings Arm's Hotel as fast as his horses could go.

At the hotel he bounded up-stairs to the room where he had left Barney O'Shea and Varley, only to find that they were gone.

Then he stopped to think.

Did Reade keep a detective to watch the movements of his two men?

If so the detective would have to be fixed ere anything could be done.

He went down-stairs and inquired of the clerk about the two men he had left in his room.

"They went out together soon after you did," replied the clerk, and that was all he could find out about it.

Neither Barney nor Pomp said a word about the adventure, but the Irishman was so mad with himself that he felt like asking Pomp to kick him.

He just wanted to see Hayward for one moment again—that was all—and he thought he could make the interview so interesting that the latter would never get over it.

One day he met a man at the corner below who asked him:

"Are you Mr. O'Shea?"

"I am," answered.

"You live with the Electric Man?"

"I do."

"Would you let a man get a look at the wonder?"

"Yis, if Mr. Reade said so."

"But he has not said so."

"Thin' bedad, yez can't say it," and Barney went on his way.

The man followed, and at the door asked him to come out and have a drink with him.

Barney promptly knocked him down, shut and locked the door.

"What youse doin', Barney?" Pomp demanded.

"Faith, an' I'll bate the hid off av the blaggard," said Barney. "He tried ter broibe me ter let him in."

"Sarved 'im right," remarked Pomp.

The man picked himself up and went away muttering threats of vengeance.

The next day Frank, with three or four friends, came down and took the Electric Man out for a spin through the streets of the city.

When they were gone, Barney and Pomp locked up the warehouse and went over to a restaurant for a lunch, knowing they would have at least two hours of liberty.

While they were at lunch a party of four men came to the door of the warehouse and rapped on the door—as if demanding admittance.

Getting no response, one of them produced a

bunch of skeleton keys and quickly unlocked the door, and the party passed within.

"It was easily done, you see," said one of the party, who seemed to be the leader. "We can conceal ourselves behind yonder pile of lumber in that corner, and at the proper time capture the Irishman and negro and make them do our bidding at the muzzle of our revolvers. Come on."

The man, who was no other than Hayward, led the way to the pile of lumber in one corner of the great warehouse.

"Our success depends," said Hayward, "on our being able to force them to do our bidding. They are not to be harmed except in the strictest self-defense. Do you all understand that?"

"Yes—we'll do just as you say," said one of the others.

"And do it promptly," he added. "All depends upon our capture of the Irishman and negro."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CAPTURE AND ESCAPE OF BARNEY AND POMP.

In about an hour after Hayward and his party entered the building Barney and Pomp returned to be on hand when Reade should arrive.

Hayward and his companions silently watched them from behind the pile of lumber.

By and by Reade and his party returned, and left the Electric Man in charge of Pomp and Barney.

A little while later Pomp was busily engaged in preparing supper, and Barney was indulging in a few whiffs from his pipe.

Hayward motioned to his men to keep quiet, and they waited till it was dark.

Then they slipped off their shoes and crept up behind the two unsuspecting individuals and presented the muzzles of revolvers against their heads.

"Just make the least bit of trouble, and you are both dead men," hissed Hayward, loud enough for both to hear.

"De Lor' gorrarnighty!" gasped Pomp, his eyes nearly popping out of his head.

"Silence! Hold up your hands!"

They could not do otherwise.

They held up their hands, for the intruders had the drop on them, and that made all the difference in the world.

"Disarm them!" Hayward ordered.

One of the party took their arms away from them.

"Now listen to me," said Hayward, addressing the two prisoners. "We have captured the Electric Man, and want you to run it for us. If you work square all right. If we see you trying to frustrate our plans we'll put bullets into you and take to our heels. We have no idea of being captured. When you have taught us how to run the thing we'll give you \$1,000 each and let you go. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sah," replied Pomp.

"Do you, Barney?"

"Yis, bedad."

"Then get up and go to work preparing the machine for a start."

Barney and Pomp made for the carriage, hoping to be able to get inside and then open fire on them with the Winchesters in there.

But Hayward was not to be caught that way. He sprang into the carriage with them, followed by the others, and clapping his weapon to Pomp's head, said:

"You run this thing right now or you'll be a dead nigger the moment you fail."

"Yes, sah," said Pomp. "Open dat door an' we'll go."

"Which door?"

"De door ob the house."

"Oh, yes. Open the door out there, Jim," ordered Hayward, "and we'll take you up outside."

The man addressed opened the door, and the Electric Man passed out into the street, stopping only to take up the man who closed the entrance to the warehouse.

Then the Electric Man dashed away up the street at a lively speed.

A driving rain was falling at the time and there were but few people on the streets.

Ten minutes later they reached the limits of the street lights, and all was darkness beyond.

"You had better light up now," said Hayward to Pomp, "so that you can see where you are going."

Pomp touched another knob and instantly the lights were on.

"What a masterly invention!" exclaimed Hayward. "It is as light as day now."

"Whar am youse gwine?" Pomp asked after a long pause, turning to Hayward.

"We are going right straight ahead," was the reply. "I'll tell you when to stop."

"Yes, sah," and Pomp kept straight ahead, thinking of the scrape he was in and how he would manage to get out of it.

While after mile was passed, and the rain still came down in torrents.

Barney and Pomp were forced to explain everything about the working of the machine as they went along.

Suddenly the wheels on the right hand side sank nearly up to the hubs in a mud hole, and the carriage came near capsizing.

"Heilo!" exclaimed Hayward, "what's the matter now?"

"We're stuck in de mud, sah," replied Pomp, making the Electric Man use one foot only, as if using all his strength to pull out.

"Well, what's to be done?"

"You'se all got ter get out an' push ter gib him a lift," said Pomp.

"Yis, so we have," put in Barney. "Bedad, but it's not the first toime I've had to do that same."

"Well, I suppose there is no help for it," remarked Hayward, "though I hate to get wet."

"Oh, come on," said one of the men. "A little wetting won't hurt any one," and they all got out but Pomp, who had to act as driver.

"Now, when I say 'ready,' all ob youse grab dem wheels and push as hard as yer kin."

"Be quick about it, then," said Hayward, as each of them took hold of a wheel.

"Ready now," cried Pomp, and each man pushed with all his might.

Suddenly the electric current caught them, and the wheels held them as if in grasps of steel.

Yells of pain and terror burst from each of them as they squirmed like so many impaled worms.

Pomp had sprang the trap on them, and now had them fast.

"Hi dar, Barney!" cried Pomp; "I'se got 'em suah."

"Whoop!" yelled Barney. "Sock it to 'em! Give 'em a good dose, the spalpeens! Whoop!"

"Take dere arms erway, Barney," suggested Pomp, and the Irishman lost no time in doing it, for as long as he did not use both hands he was in no danger of a snock.

He threw their arms into the carriage, and then Pomp asked what they should do with them.

"Kill 'em!" said Barney.

"Dat won't do, Barney. I'se er gwine ter gib 'em er big shock, an' den we kin tie 'em up afore dey gits ober it."

Barney got out the ropes and Pomp gave them a grand shake-up, which knocked them senseless.

They both sprang out and tied them hard and fast before they got over the shock.

Then they shook hands with each other and laughed over their victory.

"We got 'em dat time, suah," said Pomp, grinning from ear to ear.

"Yis, ivery son av thim," replied Barney, dancing about in the rain like a lunatic.

They decided to throw them in a heap in the bottom of the carriage, and take them back to the city.

It was done, and then the Electric Man did that which he could easily have done before—pulled the wheels out of the mud hole, and started back toward the city.

By and by one of the men in the heap came to and found himself bound.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Sure, an' don't ye know?" replied Barney.

The man looked around and saw where he was, but still did not catch on to the situation.

"Well, why am I tied up this way?" he asked.

"Bedad, it's ter kape yez from runnin' away wid us," responded Barney.

"Look heah, white man," said Pomp, "we'se boss ob dis heah kerriage now, we is."

"Where's Hayward?" the man asked.

"Ober dar," and Pomp pointed to him.

He saw they were all prisoners.

Hayward was pulling himself together, and Barney was watching him.

"Sure, an' it's foine fun ye had, Misther Hayward," said the Irishman.

"I don't know about that," replied Hayward.

"I don't see where the laugh comes in."

"Sure, an' didn't Pomp and I have it on ye? Faith, an' I niver laughed so much in me loife. It's back to Sydney we are going now."

"Why don't you go the other way, and make the fortune I was after?"

"Och, now, do yez hear that, Pomp? The omadhaun thinks it's villains we are."

"Dat's er fac'," said Pomp.

Then Hayward made an offer to buy off Barney and Pomp, but without avail. He offered them \$2,000 to drop them there in the road, but both

refused, and so they were brought back to the city before daylight dawned.

CHAPTER XLII.

CONCLUSION.

ON reaching the city they hastened to their old quarters at the old warehouse, which they entered, closed and locked the door.

Barney and Pomp never closed their eyes during the whole night, but kept a close watch on the prisoners.

As soon as the sun was up Barney set off to find Frank Reade, and report to him the incidents of the night.

Reade was not out of bed at the hotel, but the moment he was told that one of his men wanted to see him he ordered that he be sent up to his room at once, knowing that something had happened at the warehouse.

Barney's story astounded him, and he dressed quickly to go down and see the prisoners.

When he reached there Hayward said to him: "Mr. Reade, we have played a desperate game and lost."

"Yes, I am sorry you played the game, but very glad you lost. Why did you do it?"

"We tried to buy it of you, but you would not sell it, so we took it. But that nigger of yours was too much for us."

"Dat's er fac'," put in Pomp.

"Well, you took the chances and failed. We'll now let the law have a chance. I hope it will not fail."

"Better let us pay all damages, and leave the law out altogether," suggested Hayward. "We are willing to pay any sum you may think necessary."

"I never condone a crime," said Reade. "I may forgive but never condone a wrong."

"You won't be hard on us."

"I shall turn you over to the authorities, for you are not one who is driven to crime by poverty."

He refused any further parley with him, and sent for the police to take charge of them. The officers came and took them away, and then Reade took Pomp and Barney by the hand and thanked them for the admirable manner in which they had managed the robbers.

Hayward and his gang having been disposed of, Reade went back to his hotel, where he sent for Varley, who came promptly on receiving his message.

"Late last night," said Frank to him, "I re-

ceived a document from the Governor of the Colony, which gives you a year's leave of absence to visit England."

"Thank God!" gasped Varley, in a hoarse, choking voice.

"You need not have any fears of being interfered with now," said Reade. "I engaged the mayor of the city to intercede with the governor, and he was successful."

"I am under deep obligations to him, then."

"Yes; and I hope you will make your acknowledgments to him at the proper time."

"I shall not fail to do so, sir, nor will I forget that I owe all to you."

"I hope we shall always be the best of friends," returned Reade. "Have you had the Willcrafts made presentable in the matter of dress?"

"Yes, sir; you would hardly know them now. They are the happiest flock you ever saw."

"Yes, I suppose they are. Tell them that we are going to sail for England in one week from to-day."

"That will add greatly to their happiness, sir."

"And to yours, too, will it not?"

"Very much indeed, sir."

"And to mine, too. I am quite anxious to get back to America."

Varley went away to tell Willcraft and his wife what Reade had said, and to make final preparations for leaving.

The next day Frank began the task of taking the Electric Man and carriage to pieces to pack up for shipment.

It was a tedious job, but with the aid of Barney and Pomp the task was completed in three days.

In the meantime, the society which gave Reade a banquet on his arrival prepared to give him a farewell dinner on the day preceding his departure from Australia.

All the great dignitaries of the Colonial Government were present. Professor Bagstock made a great speech, in which he eulogized Reade as the greatest inventor of the age, and extolled the fidelity of the two men who had followed him so long in his travels around the world and through the air.

Reade also spoke, and was the lion of the evening, receiving attentions that would have turned the heads of much older men.

The next day he took leave of the mayor and officials of Sydney, and went on board the ship that was to convey him away to England.

Varley and the Willcrafts were on board also, but did not make themselves conspicuous.

When they were four days out an English baronet, Sir John Folkestone, recognized Varley, whom he had seen among the convicts in Tasmania.

He stopped and glared at him, and then went and reported to the captain that an escaped convict was on board and occupying a state-room.

The astonished captain sent for Varley to come to his office.

Reade went with him, and when the captain accused him he said:

"This man is my friend. He is the rightful Lord Salliston of England. He was convicted of a crime he was innocent of by perjured witnesses. I have the main witness on board this ship now, who is going back to England to undo the wrong he did twenty years ago. Mr. Varley has a year's leave of absence from the governor of the colony."

"But until the courts decide the case he is a convict," said Sir John, "and I insist that no convict shall occupy the ship's cabin with me."

"Do you insist on that after hearing his story?" Frank asked.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, all I have to say is that you are a disgrace to the name of an Englishman."

"Zounds! Do you mean to insult me?" roared the Briton.

"Yes, if the expression of such an opinion can insult you."

The irate Briton struck him.

Then Reade went for him and in a minute or two he was the worst whipped man the captain had ever seen.

Frank knocked him east and west till the captain and purser interfered and rescued the unfortunate Briton from his dilemma.

That was the last that was said about convicts, and in due time the ship reached port and our heroes landed.

Varley secreted the Willcrafts till time to use them in legal proceedings. Then he procured the best legal talent and sprung the trap.

The contest was short and sharp, and in a few months it was decided in Varley's favor.

That settled, Reade sailed for New York, where he arrived in due time to find the papers full of his exploits in far-off Australia.

Leaving Barney and Pomp to attend to the shipment of the Electric Man, he took the train for Readstown, where we shall leave him for the present in the bosom of his family.

[THE END.]

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